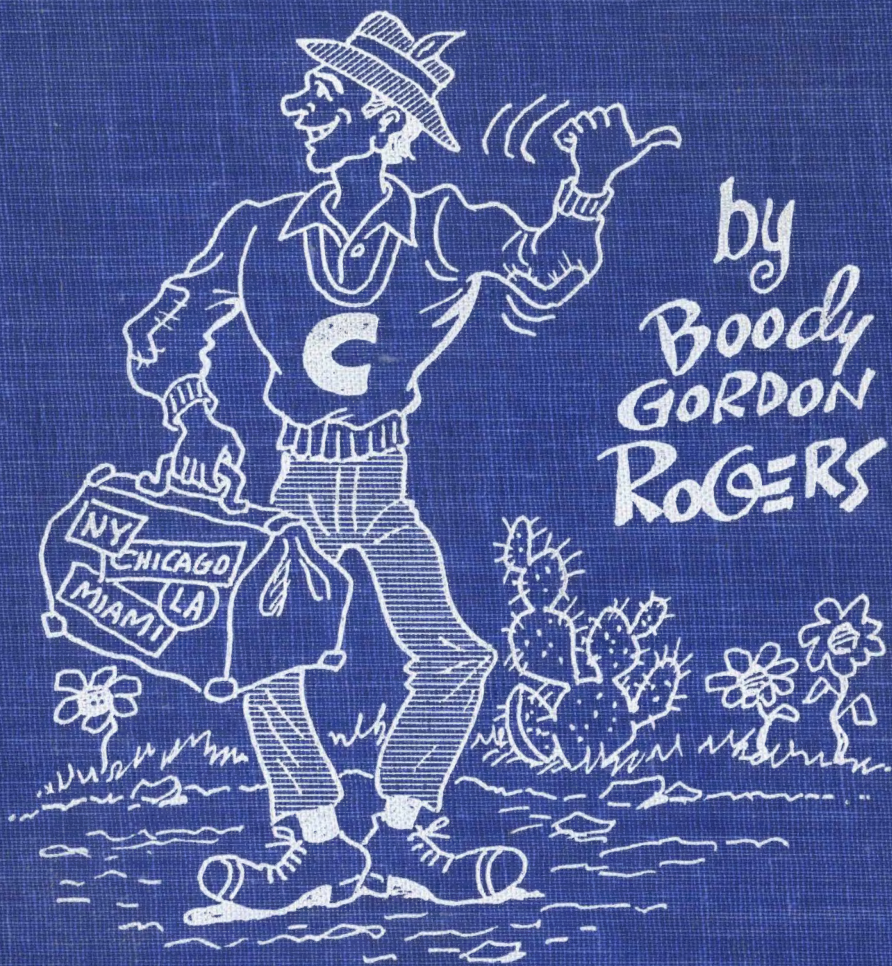


HOMELESS BOUND

by
Boody
GORDON
ROGERS



Boody
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HOMELESS BOUND



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DEDICATION

TO WHAT'S HIS NAME, THE GUY WHO
CAUSED ME TO WRITE THIS BOOK. I
WAS IN A MANHATTAN BAR... AND
THE BARTENDER SAID, "GET THE
HELL OUT OF HERE BEFORE I
SMASH YOUR FACE --- GO SOMEPLACE
AND WRITE YOUR STORY... I'M TIRED
OF LISTENING.!!"



Boody Gordon Rogers

"HOMELESS BOUND" is the true, humorous and tragic adventure of a boy (me) growing up in the early oil boom towns of Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Arkansas; my high school days in Childress, Texas; and of things that happened there that are hard to believe.

My early ambition in life was double-barrelled — first to be a football quarterback (to win the girls), and second to be a cartoonist and make people laugh. I attained both goals with some success. I worked on the first comic book ever published, and was later syndicated in over 200 newspapers coast to coast.

The yarns in the book also cover my fun from coast to coast, and from the Gulf to the Great Lakes — and then halfway around the world in the Pacific Ocean.

I entered the army in 1942. My artistic talent was quickly recognized and I was put to work painting garbage cans! I was discharged from the Service four years later as a Captain — but in between I had a million laughs. I should have been court-martialed for enjoying the whole damn business, sad as it was.

*Boody
R.G.R.S.*

Foreword

The events chronicled in this book are all true. Of course, I've turned a few corners for color, and I've changed a few names because I've never had a hankering to be shot between the eyeballs. Basically, however, the yarns actually happened as written.

Here is an inkling to my way of thinking: My high school senior class was selecting a class motto. The superintendent had chalked his suggestions on the blackboard. I couldn't get excited at all about "Hitch Your Wagon to a Star," or "Excelsior," so I stood up and nominated "When in Doubt, Eat Ham and Eggs!" That made the superintendent mad as hell, but when we voted, my motto carried 100 percent. I've never told them, but I've loved all of those kids ever since. They are my kind of people.

They say that truth is stranger than fiction. I don't know about that, but most of my truths were funny to me and made me laugh, and I hope they'll make you laugh, too. If they don't tickle your funny bone, give me a ring and the drinks are on me----and that's no bull!

So hugs and pats to you,

Boody Gordon Rogers

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1

Mr. Marshlo was beyond a doubt the nastiest, dirtiest, filthiest bastard I ever had the displeasure to see! He owned a cotton farm near Childress, a small West Texas town which I claim as home base. The last water Mr. Marshlo ever had on his head must have been when he was christened, but it had long since disappeared! He wore a shaggy beard that bore evidence of his last several meals. It usually had coffee stains, dried gravy, eggs, butter, and sometimes a few beans tangled in it. Just looking at him would make a strong man throw up! He was a rag-tailed, holy mess!

He came to town every Saturday to shop for groceries, and would always go to a soda fountain for a glass of water. After he drank, the soda-jerker would break the glass and throw it down the trash hole. That didn't faze Mr. Marshlo. He probably thought that they always broke the glass after it was used. He also probably thought that they were nuts to bust a glass after only one usage. He'd been drinking out of the same dipper for years.

One year Mr. Marshlo was charged with making his daughter pregnant. When he was put on the witness stand, he testified in a loud voice, "I shore didn't intend to knock up my only daughter. It was a pure accident. One very cold night, me, Ma and Bessie all slept together so we could keep warm. I jest turned over to get a little, and I thought it was Ma! Hell's Bells, it was darker than a bat cave — how was I to know it was Bessie?"

The judge threatened to clear the courtroom if there was any more laughter.

"Did you try to resist your father?" asked the lawyer.

"Heck, no," answered Bessie. "I thought I was dreaming and it was some han'some prince humpin' me."

The jury couldn't agree, so a mistrial was called. I guess the county decided they didn't want to spend any more money, so the charge was dropped.

I'm sure the following wasn't true, but it was bantered about that when Mr. Marshlo died, the undertaker washed off a layer of dirt and found a pair of red long-johns. He removed them and washed off another layer of dirt and found another pair of drawers. The undertaker gave up, put Marshlo in a coffin, closed the lid, sterilized his hands, and went home to a sick bed!



I'm telling you all this so you'll better understand the awful dilemma of a young soda-jerker who worked in Atkinson's Drug Store. This young man was a newcomer to Childress, but immediately became quite popular. He dated the best looking girls, and us drug store cowboys thought he hung the moon. He was from the big city of Dallas, and knew all the latest jazzy sayings, the latest dance steps, and wore the keenest clothes we ever saw. We never guessed that the poor guy had one terrible secret — he had false teeth!

Only a couple of his closest friends knew this. He promised them free Cokes if they didn't tell, and promised he'd beat hell out of them if they did!

He had a deathly fear that no girl would want to soul-kiss with him knowing that she might pull away with an extra set of molars — and he did so love to play kissey-kissey! He thought that false teeth slandered his young manhood, so he was awfully ashamed.

Now about this time Mr. Marshlo lost his last four teeth and had dentures made. He couldn't get them to rest easy on his gums, especially when he had a chaw of Ol' Dog tobacco, so he was back in town every day to have the dentist work on them. After about a week

of this, he got fed up with the dentist horsing around, and bad-mouthed the poor guy to every person he could corner.

One day he stopped Jim Barnes on the street and told him about the lousy teeth the dentist had palmed off on him.

"I ought to go right up them stairs and tell that quack where he can shove these damn teeth!"

Barnes, somehow, had learned about the soda-jerker's choppers, and loving a good joke, had a great idea that might cause some excitement.

"I know exactly what your trouble is, Mr. Marshlo. That young soda-jerker at Atkinson's Drug had a set of teeth made at the same time you did, and I'd wager that dentist got them mixed up and gave your set to that kid!"

"Holy Bollweevil!" sputtered Mr. Marshlo. "That's bound to be it! Well, I'll straighten that out right now!"

He walked as fast as he could, turned into the drug store, and plopped his false teeth down on the fountain bar — a pool of Ol' Dog tobacco juice slowly forming around them.

"Here's your goddammed teeth — now gimme mine!"

The young man froze in his tracks. He had just reached for a glass on a high shelf — so he stood there like the Statue of Liberty. His face turned a bright red, like an over-ripe tomato about to burst! He was mortified.

"Don't stand there with yer finger up yer ass," shouted Mr. Marshlo. "Gimme my teeth or I'll come around there and jerk 'em out of yer friggin' mouth!"

With that outburst, the young man recovered his mobility, dashed for the back door, and has never been seen in Childress again!



2

If there had been a World Book of Records in 1908, I'm sure that my name would have been in it. I was the only four-year-old to cause a large restaurant to be totally evacuated twice in one month.

Oklahoma had barely become a state, and my father owned the largest cafe in Mangum. It may have been the only one as far as I know. It was on the northwest corner of the courthouse square, and upstairs were several rooms where we had living quarters. The rooms didn't cover the entire top of the building, and you could walk out of our rooms to the roof of the restaurant — over the kitchen.

I was the only little kid in town who roamed constantly around the square, so everyone knew me and I knew them. I guess I was the pet of courthouse square.

I rode an Irish-Mail — a low, four-wheeled thing that you guided with your feet by pushing right or left on a pivoting front axle. You propelled it by pumping a handle that came up from between your knees.



My Buster Brown suit looked dashing as I sped by on my Irish Mail.

Old Nigger Bill made me a brake so I could stop quickly if I was about to have a head-on collision. I never found out what I might hit, as there weren't any vehicles in town except buggies and wagons.

When men saw me speeding toward them, they would spraddle their legs and yell, "Low Bridge," as I went through. I hit a few in the shanks because they didn't see me coming. Old Nigger Bill taught me to yell, "Honk, Honk!" It always worked, and the men would spraddle their legs — all but the short-legged guys, that is. They would jump to one side. I didn't know why then, but I do now!

One day at dinner time — they didn't call it lunch then — it was dinner and supper. Anyhow, a man came into the restaurant at dinner time and asked Dad, "John, do you know where your kid is?"

"Oh, riding around the square, I guess."

"Like hell he is! He's on top of the building naked as a bird's ass. I saw him on the edge as I came down the street."

I had walked out on the kitchen roof and looked over the stove pipe that came up from the big, coal-burning range in the restaurant. I reasoned that it would be fun to go down the chimney like Santa Claus, and give "Frenchy," our cook, a big surprise.

I couldn't get in the stove pipe with my clothes on, so I took them off to make myself smaller — but all I did was get soot all over my little bod-bod.

If I couldn't go down the pipe, I'd do the next best thing — I'd send my clothes! So I stuffed them into the pipe and then went over to the edge to listen for yells of delight from the cooks below.

Instead of laughter, the cooks came running out of the side door like they were shot from a cannon — and behind them came the blackest smoke you ever saw. Then out the front door came Mother, Dad, the waiters and all the customers. Black smoke was pouring out everywhere. Everywhere, that is, except the stove pipe!

Everyone on the square was running toward the cafe — then came the fire cart pulled by six volunteer firemen. A big fat man was running about half a block behind them ringing a bell. He was supposed to be in front warning people out of the way, but his fat legs were too slow.

They got out their hose, but didn't know where to squirt as they couldn't find the fire. Dad came running toward them yelling, "No, no, don't start the water, it's only smoke!!" I never saw so much excitement in my life. It was better than Christmas.

Dad finally came up, removed my clothes from the chimney, and led me inside. Mother put me in the tub and started scrubbing off the

soot. I didn't get a spanking. Dad was thankful it was my clothes and not me in the pipe, but I was cautioned in no uncertain terms to keep my distance from that chimney!

Dad later told me that the cafe was closed two days while they removed all the mess that the smoke left, and the customers never paid for the dinners they had so hurriedly left.

All of the cooks and waiters were like family, and I was their little boy.

When I came down for breakfast, the waiter would say, "Good morning, Gordon. How do you want your hot cakes today? Horses, Indians, elephants, cowboys, or what?"

I'd think that over and answer, "Oh, gimme one giraffe and a monkey with a long tail!" or any other thing I might dream up.

"Frenchy" would pour the batter to look like what I wanted. Sometimes he'd put six legs on a cow, or a head on each end of a pig, just to hear me laugh. I though "Frenchy" was my uncle or something. He had been a cook on a French ocean liner and had jumped ship in New York. How he ever got all the way out to Indian Territory, I never knew.

I loved all the hired people, and I guess they loved me. Dad's unmarried brother was one of the waiters — I thought he was my other father. Old Nigger Bill was the dishwasher, and he'd take me upstairs and tuck me in for my afternoon nap. I loved him, too.



About three weeks after the big "smoke-out," a new man was hired to work in the cafe. He was the night waiter.

He rented one of the rooms upstairs, and slept until about noon. One day he came out on the back where we had some chairs and started to give me an education. He taught me a bunch of funny words. He had me practice them over and over until I had them down perfect.

"Now go to the restaurant and tell them to your Dad, and say them real loud so everyone can hear how funny you are."

I didn't know what the words meant, but he said they were funny, so I hurried downstairs and stood in front of the cash register. The man had told me to talk loud so everyone could hear, so I took a deep breath and yelled: "DAD, LET'S GET ALL THESE SHIT-HEADS OUT OF THIS WHOREHOUSE AND HAVE OURSELVES A DANCE!"

After that, things happened so fast I didn't know which end was up. Dad vaulted over the counter, threw me over a stool, and laid one on my seat that would have made Jack Dempsey throw in the towel.

All the customers, the waiters, the cooks, and even Old Nigger Bill walked out the front door. Dad followed them to find out why.

"It wasn't Gordon's fault," said Uncle Frank. "He didn't know what he was saying — so apologize to that kid, or by God, we're on strike!"



Mangum Cafe — Uncle Frank, waiter on left, shot my profanity teacher through his keester!

Dad tried to smooth it over with me, but I was crying so loud I didn't hear a word he said. All I could think about was my poor, hurting, blistered tail!

They did find out where I learned my speech — so Uncle Frank got his pistol and went looking for the guy. The man saw Uncle Frank, ran out the back door, down the back steps, and up the alley. Uncle Frank shot just as the man was turning out of the alley, and the bullet went through both cheeks of his ass.

Uncle Frank thought he had killed the man, so he ran to the livery stable, got his horse, and left the country. After a year or so, Dad learned he had gone to South Dakota, married a pretty Indian girl, and become a United States Marshal. He never came back. Dad and I saw him 24 years later in Sacramento, California. He had come there for a trial of some bootlegger he'd caught selling to the Indians.

But to get back to Mangum — a new night man was hired — but he never tried to further my education.



3

About a year before I cleaned out the restaurant, a young, bushy-haired man drove up and hitched his horse to our hitching rack. I can faintly remember it, because it was the first racing sulky I had ever seen. I thought it was an overgrown pony cart.

The man came into the cafe, had a cup of coffee, and asked Dad, "Do you reckon Mangum could use a doctor?"

"I reckon so," answered Dad. "We don't have a sawbones here."

Mangum now had a real doctor — Doctor Border. He practiced there all the rest of his life. He built a hospital, and finally ran for Governor of Oklahoma. He lost, which I imagine was good thing for the people of Mangum.

At first, he made his doctor calls in his racing sulky, but later he even got an airplane and doctored all over western Oklahoma.

He told Dad about seeing a few of those new-fangled automobiles in Oklahoma City, so Dad got the auto bug early and went to the city to buy one. The salesman came along on the return trip so he could teach Dad how to drive. When they got about three blocks from the square, Dad started squeezing the horn. That wasn't necessary, however, because we heard the chain a-popping a mile away! Dad stopped his new chain-drive Jackson by the side of the cafe, and Mother and I climbed up — up — up into the back seat. Boy, was it keen! Leather seats and shiny brass everywhere! Dad got 'er going again, and 'round and 'round the square we went! Dad was squeezing the bulb horn for all he was worth — the chain was popping and banging — the dogs were barking and farmers were running to hold their horses! The salesman was waving his hat and whooping like crazy! People came running out of the stores to see what was making all the noise — then began clapping their hands and yelling, "Git a hoss!" Mother was twirling her pink umbrella and blowing kisses to her friends — and she didn't have an enemy in town. Me, I just sat there - grinning like a possum eating slop - and waving to all the kids who came running and hollering behind us. I'm sure it was my proudest moment — and I had every right to be proud

— because my Dad — MY VERY OWN DAD HAD THE VERY FIRST HORSELESS CARRIAGE IN MANGUM, OKLAHOMA!

Nigger Bill was promoted from dishwasher to “Keeper of the Brass.” That was his only job, and he kept our precious auto shining like a pot of gold!

Doctor Border challenged Dad to race against his horse and sulky, so we all went to the race track. It was a hair-raising contest. I was in the back seat with Mother. She was holding me, and I was holding on for dear life! The sheriff was in the front seat with Dad. I imagine we reached speeds up to 15 miles per hour on the straightaways, but Doc’s rig beat us easily. Dad was afraid to open ‘er up on the curves. Doctor Border said autos were pretty, but doubted they were here to stay.

One bitterly cold winter, Doctor Border and the sheriff decided the town should have a little excitement to wake everybody up.

They got a fellow, dressed him in a blue serge suit, powdered his face snow-white, and darkened around his eyes; then placed him in a coffin down in the basement of the courthouse.

They came to Dad and told him they had found a frozen dead man in the river bottom south of town. They wanted Dad and a couple of other merchants to come and see if they could identify him.

They all went to the courthouse basement and looked at the poor man. Suddenly the corpse sat up and screamed! At the same moment, the sheriff switched off the lights!

It was pitch black in the basement. There were benches and chairs everywhere that were used for town meetings. Well, you can imagine what happened with three men running for the one stairway. Dad missed the stair opening and hit the wall face-on, breaking his nose. The other two guys got out with only skinned shins from falling over benches.

The sheriff stopped everyone before they got out of the building — took them up to Doc Border’s office for first aid and a promise of secrecy. The doctor and sheriff then went for more customers.

This act continued until every merchant on the square had an equal chance to maim himself for life! There were two broken arms, a number of black eyes, and enough meat left on the benches and chairs to stock a meat market. Doc said he had more business that day than any day before or since — and all for free! He would have been tarred and feathered and ridden out of town on a rail if he hadn’t been the only doctor in town. They thought he might be needed if someone shot the sheriff. The sheriff wasn’t shot, but he sure as hell lost the next election!

Years later, we were living in Pioneer, Texas, and my Mother became very sick. I was sitting by her bed one day and she said, "Look, Gordon; look at all the pretty ladies wearing their big hats; aren't they beautiful — all covered with flowers and plumes?"

I said, "Where, Mother? I don't seem them."

"Over by the wall — see, they're coming this way."

"Oh, I see them now," I lied. "They are very beautiful." Then I went outside and cried.

The next day Dad phoned Doctor Border in Oklahoma and told him we needed help. The doctor was just going to the operating room — but in two hours he landed his plane in a pasture at the edge of town. But he was too late.

I guess people used to be really good friends.

4

I was about seven when we lived in Dalhart, Texas. Dad was night man at a little cafe there. He waited on the counter, took the order, then went to the kitchen and cooked it. He also washed the dishes, then scrubbed the joint before daylight so it would be nice and clean when the boss showed up.

Dalhart was really the trading post for the big XIT Ranch. Dad said the place would fill up with cowboys on Saturday night. They all wanted steak and eggs, well done, and plenty of scalding, black coffee.

They had a nice little two-story brick school in Dalhart, and it had a wonderful fire escape slide from one of the upper windows. It was a big, round tin pipe, so when you went into it, 'twas like floating through the night. You suddenly woke up, though, when your butt hit the ground below.

A kid would start for the pencil sharpener and pass by the slide window. If the teacher wasn't looking — Swoosh! The kid was down the tube. He always got a spanking, but it was worth it. The spanking didn't hurt much because our seats were toughened up from hitting the ground at the bottom.

A lot of mothers visited our class. I knew my Mother was more beautiful than any of them, so I started begging her to come. She said she would some day, and I could hardly wait to show her off.

There was a lot of whispering going on in my room — saying funny things to make the girls giggle was right down my alley. The teacher got fed up with this nonsense, so she got a bunch of white

raggs to use as gags. When she caught someone talking she tied one around his mouth. This was even more fun than talking. We looked like a room full of train robbers — and you could hear muffled giggles when some kid acted like he was choking to death.

One evening Mother told me she had visited my class that day. “You couldn’t have, Mother; I was there all day.” “Yes, I was there,” she said. “I peeped in the door and saw you with a gag on, and I was too ashamed to come in.”

That almost broke my heart. She never visited my school again, and I went to forty before I got to high school. Dad followed the oil booms and ran restaurants. When the boom slacked off, he’d sell out and move to the next one — so we moved, and moved, and moved.

One day while still living in Dalhart, another boy and I got a job handing out hand bills. It was a hot, Texas day, so when we came to a drug store, we turned in and asked the fountain clerk if we could have a cold drink of water.

“Sure,” he said. “But better still, why don’t you men have a water-drinking contest, and the winner will get a big free root beer!”

Now that sounded pretty good to me — especially that big, free root beer. So the skeet filled our glasses and we were off to the races. We drained four or five glasses real fast, then got down to taking gulps. My opponent would take a swallow, and then I’d take a little larger one. This went on until it felt like water was squirting out my ears. Finally the other kid threw in the sponge. He almost drowned. His eyes were round like a calf’s in a thunderstorm.

“You win,” said the skeet. “How do you want your root beer — plenty of foam or do you take it straight?”

I didn’t answer the son-of-a-bitch. I just leaned over against the fountain and puked on his floor.

Next we moved to Wichita Falls, Texas — then to Childress where my Mother’s parents lived. Dad put in an airdrome moving picture show. That’s a forerunner of the drive-in — about a 35-year forerunner, that is.

The airdrome was on an empty lot between two buildings. A high board fence was built across the front and across the back. The seats were benches made from one-by-twelve boards. A white wagon sheet was the screen. It cost a nickel to get in, and the only sound effects were the smart alecs on the front row. When the hero kissed the gal, some guy would kiss the back of his hand and make a sound like a cow pulling her foot out of a mud hole. Of course, everyone would laugh.

There was no top on the airdrome, so it was fairly cool, but on a real hot night all you could hear was the swishing of the palm-leaf fans passed out by the local undertaker.

Dad sold out, and we were off again — just as I was about to get acquainted with all the kids.

This time we went up to Kansas City. Dad got a job running a street car. On Sundays, he would sometimes take Mother and me for a ride. He'd let me clang the bell. The conductor would always look the other way when we got on and not charge us. I guess he was supposed to, but he knew what my Dad was paid . . . so I guess a dime was really a dime in those days.

We had rented rooms in a home owned by a German family. I remember that they had a light feather mattress on top of another mattress. They slept between them. I thought they were nuts, but I guess they knew what they were doing as central heating hadn't been invented.

Some evenings Dad would give me a dime and send me for a bucket of beer. They called it "rushing the growler." The bucket was made specially for beer — just large enough for a dime's worth. Mother would butter the inside bottom to cut down on the foam. I'd take it to the saloon's side door and ring the bell. A hand would come out, take the bucket, then in a moment it was back full to the brim. Mother would always let me have just enough to wet my whistle. Those were fun days.

Then it was school time again. I started to school in the biggest school building I had ever seen. They even had inside toilets.

About the second day, I said something on the playground — and was overheard by my teacher. She grabbed me by the ear and marched me to our room. I stood there while she soaped a washrag — wondering what she was going to wash. That old biddy scrubbed hell out of my tongue, gums, and I think, even my tonsils! I don't know what kind of soap she used, but it sure wasn't chocolate flavored. It tasted like something you might find in a chicken coop. I don't remember what I said, but one thing for sure, I never let her hear me say it again.

5

Oil was discovered in Augusta, Kansas. I was glad to get away from that big city school. Augusta was more my size — also, the Walnut River ran right against the town. I had learned to dog paddle at Dalhart, but by the time we left Augusta, I was an expert swimmer.

My greatest feat in Augusta, though, was on election night. Woodrow Wilson, Democrat, was running against Republican Taft, and Teddy Roosevelt on the Bull Moose ticket.

Another boy and I were hired — 50c, I believe — to carry the election results from the depot to the newspaper building. A man was up on the awning. He'd take our paper and write the vote returns on a big blackboard. The other carrier and I would pass each other running back and forth. One of us was always going toward the depot while the other was running for the newspaper. The news was coming over the railroad ticker. How the operator could read all those clicks so fast was beyond me — then he'd rip off a sheet, hand it over, and I ran as fast as I could. The crowd would see me coming and yell, "Here he comes!" It was a very important job.

Finally Mr. Taft won. There was much shouting and handshaking — so off to bed I went, happy that a Republican had won. I didn't know a Republican from a rat hole, but everyone seemed happy, so I was too. After all, I had helped elect him!

The next morning, there was gloom in old Mudville — Mr. Taft had struck out! The results hadn't come in from California when we went to bed — but now they were in, and Mr. Taft was kaput!

The main street in Augusta was just one big mass of holes. Hauling so much oil pipe and big machinery over it had cut it to pieces. It was so rough that it would jar out an auto tail light before the car had gone two blocks.

One night the police started handing out tickets for the missing lights. A big crowd of men formed at an intersection where the two cops were waiting for their next auto. Every time they gave some motorist a ticket, the crowd would boo. In a few minutes there were

probably a thousand men there, and the cops were getting madder and madder.

To put the icing on the cake, some pipeliner got a big, white horse. He put a lighted lantern on a broom and carried it over his shoulder as he rode down to the intersection, held out his arm to make a left turn, and circled the center post. The crowd was cheering and clapping. This was just too much for one of the policemen, so he whipped out his 45 and shot the lantern off the broomstick.

Well, brother, that's when everything hit the fan. The crowd rushed the cops like a wave of water, took their guns, and dragged them down the street. I was right in there seeing it all well done. I let my knee britches down below my knees, hoping nobody would notice how young I was.

First we went to the jail. By this time the two policemen were pretty beat up, but were still held by several men who took a punch now and then. Poles were brought up and the cops were made to batter holes in the jail walls and free all the prisoners.

Some guy yelled, "Let's get the goddamn Mayor!" So here we went to his house. I guess there were a couple of thousand men by this time, as the street was full. The mayor came out on his porch and said, "Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" He wore a goatee just like Uncle Sam. Some guy grabbed the goatee and jerked the poor mayor out into the crowd. I was right up there on the front row! Boy! Was I going to have something to tell Mother and Dad!

"Let's hang the dirty bastards!" the crowd yelled. "Get some ropes, get some ropes!" Man! Now I really would have something to tell! Then back to town we all went — with me still in the front row.

Instead of hanging the cops and mayor, the mob decided to run them out of town. So they loaded them in a car and told them to get lost and stay lost.

The car roared down the street and out of town. Someone said, "Look, they don't have a tail light!" Dad grabbed my arm — he had been trying to find me since the trouble began. He didn't realize I'd be up front where us big guys should be.

My room was over the cafe and faced out over Main Street. I lay in my window all night watching the drinking and dice games on the street below. The men received word that police were coming from Eldorado, so they broke open a hardware store and got all the guns. They stacked boxes and things across the street for a breastworks — but nothing happened. It was all a big, lousy disappointment!

I saw my first game of football at Augusta. The high school was in the same building with us grammar school kids — and every

day I was so close to the big football players that I could have reached out and touched them. At recess, before a game, the football team and a flock of gals would sit around and sing, "Hail, hail, the gang's all here — what the hell do we care now!"

Boy, that sounded pretty snazzy to me, and I wished I'd hurry and get big so I could sit with the girls and sing wild songs like that. I did finally get big, and I did sit with the girls, but I sure as hell didn't waste my time singing!

When they played football back then, the quarterback was always a little guy. If they got near the goal line, or just needed a little for a first down, two big guys would pick up the quarterback and throw him over the line. They just hoped he didn't hit on his head and drop the ball. I made up my mind right then that I was going to be a quarterback — the girls were bound to like a guy who had that kind of guts.

Nothing else of importance happened in Augusta that I can remember, except that I got chewed out every time I was sent to the blackboard. The teacher would tell me to add up 12 plus 12 plus 36, or some stupid thing like that. So, instead I'd draw a guy sitting on a barbed wire fence. The kids would laugh, and I'd get both barrels. I didn't mind too much, because after I became a quarterback I was going to be a cartoonist — and nothing was going to stop me.

6

News came about a big oil strike at Ragtown, Oklahoma. The real name of Ragtown was Wirt. It was about 25 miles from Ardmore. When Wirt was first started, it consisted of four or five frame buildings, and about 500 tents — half of which were filled with whores. One day, a cyclone hit without warning, and pieces of tents, nightgowns, negligees and towels were hanging in all the trees. Some bright wit said, "This looks like a goddamn rag town!" So Ragtown it was from then on.

Dad left Mother and me in Ringling nearby until he could get a building built for his cafe and a place for us to live.

The Ringling school was in a church. All classes were in the same room. While one class was reciting, the other classes were supposed to study. There wasn't too much studying going on because you were too busy dodging big, juicy spitballs.

At recess our big game was Blackman, and that's when I first met Bessie. Bessie could run faster than any boy I ever saw. When she ran though, she held up her dress and all you saw was a flash of yellow drawers going by. If the Olympic games had been going on then, she would have been hump-shouldered from wearing all the gold medals.

I was smitten on Bessie, and I think she liked me. One day she said, "You can't run very fast, but you can dodge like a jackrabbit." With that she gave me a peck on the cheek. She kinda leaned against me, and felt so soft, so round and warm like a depot stove. Hot Damn! At last I was gonna get me a girl to sing with — but that night Dad came to take us to our new home.

Dad had gotten us rooms in a two-story wooden hotel. The whole town looked like the western cowboy towns you see on T.V. All the buildings were clapboard fronts with wooden awnings and board sidewalks.

That evening, Mother and I walked across the street for supper, and about halfway I passed a kid, my size, and one of his eyes was blacker than a cat and swelled shut. He looked at me out of his good eye, and I could tell from his look that he would enjoy blacking mine. Just before we turned into the cafe, I saw another kid — and damned if he didn't have a black eye! I wondered what in hell my Dad had gotten me into.

The next morning I started to school — another one-room affair in a little frame church. I was given a seat with a kid called "Dirty" Shyrook. "Dirty" said, "Our teacher is a dopehead! In about an hour she'll have to go out to the crapper and take a bang." I had never seen a hop-head before, so I kept my eyes glued on her. She got slower and slower until her tail was just about dragging the floor — then she told us to all keep studying, and she took off for the outhouse.

After a bit she came back. She was a new woman — a regular ball of fire. She might have been a doper — but she was a sweet, good teacher. At least I thought so. I felt sorry for her and couldn't imagine how she ever got herself in such a mess.

At recess, the guys ganged around me and wanted to know all about me. Finally some kid said, "Do you wanna fight?" Hell no, I didn't want to fight. All I wanted to do was go back to Ringling and see Bessie.

Some kid shoved a pair of boxing gloves at me. "Here, put 'em on and fight Jake!" I had gotten a set of boxing gloves one Christmas, and I'd used them quite a bit. Dad had shown me how to cover up, and jab, and do the old one-two.

"Okay," I said. But all I could remember were those two black eyes I had seen yesterday. We squared off, and right quick I saw that Jake wasn't the world's best boxer. He had a habit of closing his yees when he thought he was going to get hit — so when I'd feint a jab, he'd close up — then I'd give him the ol' one-two, and three and four! I beat the tar out of Jake! Later he was my best friend.

At noon a girl came up to me — and I'd never seen such a beautiful girl before. She made ol' Bessie look like a fence post.

"You whipped Jake good — what's your name?"

"Gordon Rogers — what's yours?"

"I'll take cream soda," she said and laughed. "That's a joke, but my name is Opal — Opal Isim!"

We stood looking at each other a few moments, then she said, "I used to be Jake's sweetheart, but now I think I like you!"



L to R: Dirty Shyrock, Finecomb S.

She put her hands on my shoulders. Quick like a bunny I put my hands on her shoulders — and I had that depot stove feeling again. Then she came a little closer and I could feel the heat clear to my backbone. My hands slipped a little — and I swear to you that I've never felt anything so soft and so round. Right then I decided to marry that girl just as soon as Mother would let me.

I was made a member of the main gang of kids — Jake McCarthy, Dennis Melton, Pete Sager, "Dirty" Shyrock, and "Fine Comb Shit." "Fine Comb Shit" got his name a few days after I joined the gang. Ragtown's main street was about three blocks long, without any cross streets. It was flat for about a block, then going east it went downhill to a little creek, then up again to the first cross street. All the main stores, cafes and gambling houses were on the flat section. Going down the hill were about ten warehouses and "barrelhouse" dance halls on each side of the street. The girl houses were one-story, narrow, clapboard buildings — a long hall with rooms on each side.

Us boys would usually walk back of the warehouses. You saw a lot more than from the street. The back ends were all alike — a window on either side of a back door. It was usually open, and you got some great views looking down the hall. One day we were back of the houses, and a naked woman came crashing through the window. Naturally, we all stopped to see this unexpected pleasure. The woman got up, shook her head and said, "You dirty, chiseling son-of-a-bitch!" Then she ran back in the door. In about ten seconds she came out the same window — right on her blonde head. This time she didn't get up. In about five minutes, two gals came out and carried her back in. We all got a good close look at her, and I was amazed that a girl was built so much different than a man. I think it was "Dirty" who voiced all our thoughts: "I don't see how the hell she takes a piss out of that short thing!"

"Fine Comb's" name was Bill something or other, and as we walked on down the hill he found a fine comb. He picked it up and asked what it was. A fine comb, for those who don't know, is a very fine-toothed comb — the teeth very close together so you can comb the dandruff or lice out of your hair.

Jake looked at it and said, "It's a fine comb!"

Bill threw it away and said, "Fine comb, shit — it ain't worth a goddamn!" So, from then on he had a new name.

Oil boom towns had a habit of burning to the ground, especially Ragtown. I saw it go up in flames six times — everything except the outhouses, thank God!

There was no law in Ragtown, so maybe every three or four months Constable Bud Ballew would drop over from Ardmore. There were never any fights or shootings when Bud was in town. He had killed a few men, and had a good, fast draw. I followed him around hoping I'd see him blast someone, but all I ever saw him do was take a few 45's away from men who showed a bulge — and one night he searched a guy and found a Derringer up his sleeve. Bud held it up for the crowd to see and said, "Looky at this! I'll just wear it for a watch fob!" Of course, everyone hee-hawed — everyone wanted Bud to feel good.

Before he'd leave town, he'd go around and close all the gambling houses and put the injunction sign on the door. This meant they couldn't open up again in that building.

That started the fur to fly. Everyone knew that in exactly two days the town would burn. When the gambling house was rebuilt, it was another building — so the injunction didn't affect it.

Mother and I packed all our clothes, and Dad got everything he could out of the cafe. Every wagon that could be hired was full of someone's belongings — to be taken to a safe place. Then the fire!

Us kids would race up and down the street to watch her burn. There was no fire department and no one tried to stop it — just enjoyed on whopping big weiner roast!

By the way, my name in Ragtown was "Blackshirt" Rogers. My Mother made me several black satin shirts. I guess she hoped I'd look cleaner a little longer. Opal liked my black shirts. She liked to rub her hands up and down to feel the smooth satin. I liked to rub my hands up and down her no matter what she was wearing. She felt so smooth, so soft, so round, so fully packed.

Our school was moved to Dundee, a small village a mile west. They had a regular school house. Nothing very exciting happened there, except watching some kid get his britches dusted about every ten minutes.

I think I went there most of a year, and my class changed teachers about five times. They literally wore the poor gals out. Their switching arm couldn't take it. Along toward the last we got a pretty teacher who was very small. The morning barely got started before she jerked Jake up and started laying on the switch. She gritted her teeth, started at his shoulder blades and worked down to the bottom

of his seat. The dusk was almost choking. All the guys looked at each other, but not another peep was heard before recess.

We all ganged around Jake. "God-a-mighty, she warped you good — how was it?"

"Couldn't feel it," said Jake. "She looked like she was beating hell out of me, but she can't hit hard enough to kill a fly!"

That did it. After recess every boy in class got switched before lunch. It was a three-ring circus for the gals, and we enjoyed it, too. Once she broke a switch and a kid on the front row picked up the two pieces. He handed one to me and we had a duel.

The poor little teacher's tongue was hanging out by this time, but she wasn't giving up. She started letting the other kid have it across the arms. He jammed his arms in his desk. She whirled and started laying it on my bare arms — my sleeves were rolled up. I tried to get them in my desk, but it was too full of books. I was trapped, and every lick she hit raised a welt like a railroad track.

That evening Mother saw my beat-up arms and asked what happened. I confessed . . . and she took the back side of her hair brush and matched welt for welt on my bare butt!

I never got another whipping in school until I lived in Ranger, Texas.

We left Ragtown. Opal kissed me goodbye — Man! was she soft and round!

7

Let's stop Gulliver's travels for a moment and go back to Childress, Texas.

When Mother died in 1922, Dad thought it might be better if I stayed in one place for my high school days. My grandparents gave me room and board, and Dad sent them money to help on the grocery bill.

Right off the bat, I made one of the major mistakes of my life. Dad asked me if I'd like a new Ford automobile. I said I'd rather have a motorcycle. I must have been out of my cotton-pickin' mind! Any blithering idiot — any numb-skull — any halfwit — anybody with the brain of an addled goose should know the best place to feel soft and round is in the back seat of a Model T.

I had as many as three girls on my motorcycle at one time, and I never got even one good feel. Motorcycles didn't have big cushy seats

then like they do now. The seat was hard as a rock, and just big enough for the driver. The shock absorbers were this side of nothing. With our rough roads, your kidneys felt like they were being driven down to your shoes.

Anyhow, I tried to make do with the best I had. There were three girls who liked to go for a ride in the evening and let the cool breezes blow through their hair. I had a little cushion on the gas tank where one could sit side-saddle. One girl would straddle the front bumper facing backwards and holding onto the handle bars. The other would straddle the rear bumper and hold on to me. Hell's bells, I was so busy trying to keep from dumping them on their asses that I never got one decent feel. I guess they were soft and round — but you sure couldn't prove it by me.

These same girls were involved in a funny situation my first year in high school. They were all movie fans and would skip school now and then to watch handsome Wallace Reid. Mr. Harrison, the superintendent at that time, had the girls in his office: "I just don't know what to do with you three girls. It would take six guards working full time to keep you in school. If you were boys, I'd-----" Just at that moment, a little, skinny kid named Bob Brown walked into the office bringing some papers from a teacher.

Mr. Harrison grabbed him by the arm, bent him over a table, and started whaling the daylights out of Bob with a two-inch wide paddle. "This is what I should do with you girls;" said Mr. Harrison.

"What did I do, Mr. Harrison?" asked Bob as he rubbed his stinging bottom.

"You walked in here at the wrong time — that's what you did — now get out of my office, all four of you, and let this be a good lesson to you!"

Football practice began two weeks before school.

"Where do you think you can play?" asked the coach.

"Quarterback . . . I'm a quarterback!"

"Can you pass?"

"Well, not too hot!"

"Can you kick?"

"Not too far!"

"Then what the hell can you do?"

"I can call the signals and run like hell with the football — that's what I can do!"

After a few days practice, the coach put me at right halfback. We went to Paducah for our first game. I was doing pretty good —

making some yardage on every carry, but those Paducah boys were coming harder and harder. My signal was called for a left end sweep. I got around the corner and was heading for paydirt when some defensive back tackled me head on. His head hit squarely in my crotch, and I felt a blinding pain. My poor dickie felt like it was ripped wide open — just like a banana split!

“GANG AROUND ME, MEN — HURRY! MY DICK IS SPLIT — GANG AROUND SO THEY CAN’T SEE ME — I’VE GOT TO PULL MY BRITCHES DOWN!”

Both teams closed in tight. Everyone wanted to see. Also, everyone on the sideline within hearing distance — because it isn’t every day that you get to see a guy with a split pickle!

I was on the ground in utter agony. I did manage to get my pants down, but I couldn’t bear to look! My first goddamned game and I get crippled for life! The coach gently loosened my jockey strap — I could feel the blood gushing out. I was getting weaker and weaker — so young — and dying!

“How bad is it split, coach?” asked some player. Oh, my God, I thought. I’m gonna pass out.

“Is it bleeding much?” asked another guy. “Of course, it’s bleeding,” I screamed. “It’s split from stem to sternum.” And it still felt like it.



"No," said the coach. "It's a little red, but it ain't split!"

After a few minutes, the pain subsided. I finished the game, but to this day I've never felt such searing, wracking, killing pain! Later in the season I was switched to quarterback, where I played every game for four years. I learned to pass and kick, too. That's how I got the name of Boody . . . I could boot the pants off that ball!

Tollie Norris and I hid our motorcycles back of a signboard and watched the highway. It was rough and all dirt, and if a car was doing as much as 30 miles per hour, the driver was a daredevil. When an auto went by, we took out after it, pulled alongside and ordered the driver to stop. I'd place my motorcycle in front of the car, and Tollie would block the rear — we had 'em trapped!

"Where's the fire?" we'd say. "You were going pretty fast!" They would lie like dogs. "The speedometer is broken," or "It isn't working right," or "My wife was supposed to be watching the speed while I watched the road."

We never did tell them we were cops. It's a thousand wonders some guy didn't blast us. We'd give them a talk about the danger of speed — then ask them if, by chance, they had a cigaret.

"Yes, sir," they'd say. "Here, keep the whole pack — we've got more."

We'd let 'em go — with a caution to watch that cop at Quanah. Hell, there wasn't a motor cop between Amarillo and Ft. Worth.

One day we told John Compton, the sheriff, what we were doing. He said, "Cut it out! If you caused some lady to have a miscarriage, or something, they'd sue you from now on!" They could have sued Tollie, but all they could have gotten from me was my motorcycle!

Lyster was a handsome boy — smooth, even features with a slight Roman nose that gave him a sexy look. Lyster and I were best pals during my first year in Childress.

He was drafted to play the part of a girl in a play the Eastern Star was putting on. They fixed him up cute as a bug — wig, silk undies, silk hose, high heels, a beautiful red dress, and good makeup. In fact, he could pass for a girl anywhere.

The play was given in the Masonic Hall, so I waited downstairs until he finished performing. Finally, he came down with all his fancy duds on. "Gimme a cigaret — I haven't had one in an hour."

He lit up, and we were standing there talking when the ten o'clock movie let out. People were passing us, and I noticed that we were getting some very hard looks.

“Lyster, they think you’re a floosey — smoking a cig on the street!” Nice women didn’t dare smoke in public then. That put a bug in our bonnets. We walked about half a block to a barber shop. The shine boy was cleaning up, and five or six young guys were loafing in the soft chairs. Most people were still using a number three wash tub for bathing, so all barber shops had a bathtub in the back room. You could get a haircut, shave, bath and a shine for \$1.10.

We walked up to the door. I had my arm around Lyster’s waist — I smiled, “Boys, do you mind if this young lady and I do a little wham-wham in the bathroom?” Nobody said a word — they just sat there with their mouths open, looking at sweet Lyster.

We stood there a moment, and then I said, “Okay, if that’s the way you feel about it, to hell with it! I’ll just go around to the other shop.”

We walked up to the corner, and as we turned, we both looked back. Seven heads were looking out the door at us. “We’ve got their attention,” Lyster whispered. We went across Main Street to the other big shop. It, too, had several loafers shooting the bull. We walked in the door, and the talking ceased at once. All eyes were on my babe.

“Do you mind if Sugar and I rip off a little hunk in your bathroom?” Again, complete shock and silence! I noticed that no one was looking at me. All eyes were on Lyster. The cleaning boy was holding his mop about two feet off the floor — stone still!

“Come on, Sugar — if these fatheads won’t help a guy out, we’ll just find some other place!”

As we walked out the door, we saw the seven heads across the street peeping around the corner. Now in Childress, after the shows let out, they almost pull up the sidewalks. Nobody is up and about but a few guys coming back from dates — making the drag one more time.

A car came by with a guy I knew, so I hailed him. We told this friend what was cooking, and asked him if he’d let us use his car to further the gag. He was agreeable. We got in and took off. This time we saw at least a dozen guys watching us.

We drove out to the Fair Park and waited a few minutes, then drove back near the barber shop. I got out, and Lyster and our friend drove off.

Immediately I was surrounded by them. “Who the hell is that gal — what’s she doing here?”

“Oh, she’s a kid I met in Amarillo — she just came down for a little fun. Boy, she’d rather diddle than eat apple pie when she’s real hungry — she just can’t get enough!”

"How about us? How about me? Boy, she's sure a looker!"

"Okay, you guys match to see who goes. I'll try to make it all right with Fern."

They matched and found the next guy who was up to bat. They were all talking at once — "How about me?" "Ask her for me!" "Get me in there!" I was suddenly the most popular guy in town.

The car came back, and I pretended to plead with Lyster. Then I motioned for the next customer. He piled in the car, and we drove back to Fair Park. The guy asked if he could take the seat out of the car so he could stretch out. "Sometime I get a cramp."

He took off his pants. Lyster lay down on the seat, and the guy took the correct position. Suddenly he jumped up like somebody had shot him in the ass with a shotgun!

"What the hell's going on here? This girl's got a dinkus!"

"You must be mistaken!"

"Whatta ya mean, mistaken — I felt it with my hand!"

Then we told him the truth. He thought it was a great idea. "I can hardly wait 'til old Hillard tries it. Boy, he'll come unglued!"

We drove back to town. The crowd had increased to about nine or ten boys. They were all sitting on the curb. When we stopped in



the middle of the street, they all stood up, hoping they might be next. I walked over to the curb and called one of the guys out.

"She wants you next," I said. He was in the car before you could say Jack Robinson played for the Dodgers. I stayed behind. I never heard so many guys talking at once in my life. They were all trying to butter me up. More fellows came up. They told me one of their pals telephoned them to come to town. They were actually getting out of bed!

Hillard called me aside. "How did it go with Tom?" "Fine. He said it was the best!"

"If you'll let me be next, I'll dance at your wedding."

"No, she's spotted a few guys she wants — but I'll talk to her."

The studs were restless. No one was talking now — all eyes were looking toward Fair Park. "Here they come," they said, and all stood up.

Another car had joined the party, so this time I sent an extra three along. Every time, Hillard would ask if he could be next. "No, she's saving you for the last. She wants to end the night with a bang!"

"Well, I hope she won't bang herself out," said Hillard. "Some of these jerks will go twice if she don't watch it."

"She's no dumb Dora," I said. "She knows all the tricks. Hey, that was fast — they're back!"

All of the last customers got out of the cars. They looked daggers at me, but they didn't spill the beans. Some of them walked off to bed. More guys came up and took their places in line. The extra car driver was now going around town waking every fellow he could.

"Hey," said Hillard, "these late arriving sons-of-bitches aren't gonna be ahead of me, are they? I've darn near got the stone ache!" Load after load went to the Fair Park, and Hillard was walking the street. "She'd better hurry, or I'm gonna die!"

"Don't worry," I said. "If she can't bring you back to life, nobody can!" It was just about daybreak. I thought I'd better bring this thing to an end. The car came up. I walked out to the auto — then motioned to Hillard. He took three running steps, hit the running board, and vaulted into the back seat beside Lyster. It happened so fast that Lyster didn't have time to protect himself. Hillard grabbed old Lyster and planted a big wet kiss on his lips, and then started undressing. I looked at Lyster and he was trying to dry his mouth. He was making the darndest face I ever saw.

By the time we got to Fair Park, Hillard was naked as a jay bird! He jumped out and threw his clothes on the hood — then sprang back into the car. The driver of the car, who was Hillard's friend, Tom,

and I walked off a discreet distance. Suddenly Lyster let out a scream that would make a panther blush. Hillard came backing out of the car pulling Lyster by the only handle he had found.

“Come out of there, you son-of-a-bitch! I’ll teach you to screw my night up!” Lyster was trying to keep up with Hillard. He sure didn’t want to lose what Hillard was pulling. We all ran to save Lyster. We got him free — then Hillard turned on me and his friend.

“I can whip all you dirty bastards! This is the rottenest stunt ever pulled on a guy. Had me all worked up and ready for five hours — then this!”

We finally soothed Hillard, but I don’t think he ever liked any of us again. If you wanted to get a fight, all you had to do was call him “Hot Lips.”

Lyster and I went home. The sun was coming up. Lyster said, “Boy, I’m bushed. If I had as many stickers coming out of me as I’ve had dicks poking me, I’d look like a porcupine.”

The only aftermath I heard about our party was about one married man. When he got home, his wife asked him where he’d been all night. “Oh, a bunch of us boys were playing pool at the country club and just didn’t notice the time.”

“That’s funny,” she said. “The country club burned down three weeks ago.”

He thought this bit of news over for a minute, then answered, — “Well, that’s my story and I’m sticking with it!”

8

The big Matador Ranch is not far from Childress. One fine day several cowboys were riding along a fence to repair any breaks. They saw a big bobcat. They took out after it, and one cowboy got a rope on the cat. Another lassoed him, and they stretched the cat out between them.

“Now, what will we do with the beast?” they said.

There was a line shack nearby, and one boy though he remembered an old suitcase there. He rode to the shack, brought the suitcase back, slipped it down over the bobcat, got the ropes off, and latched the bag.

"Now what'll we do with the rascal?"

"Set the suitcase out on the highway," said a cowboy. They did, and watched from behind a mesquite tree. Along came a carload of black men. One jumped out and grabbed the bag, got inside the auto, and they started on down the road. The cowboys followed as fast as their horses could run. They knew that something was going to happen very soon.

ALL FOUR DOORS FLEW OPEN AT THE SAME TIME — AND GUYS STARTED BAILING OUT WHILE THE CAR WAS STILL MOVING!

When they opened the suitcase, the bobcat started circulating across their heads trying to get away. The driver couldn't get out as fast as the others, and he got cut up pretty bad.

The cowboys took him to the hospital and paid for the stitching up. So, let this be a lesson — never, never pick up a suitcase on a western highway. You can never tell what little goodie may be lurking inside.

Childress isn't a big town, but it's had a goodly share of town idiots. One addled fellow worked for years at a feed store and grain elevator. He unloaded boxcars, or anything that needed doing. Working around boxcars gave him the idea that he was also a railroad engineer. He ran "old 97" in his dreams.

One time I was working as check-out for the Great A&P. Mr. Hickman, our manager, was talking to a salesman. It was an early, sunshiny winter day when in walked "Mr. Feed Store Worker!" He hadn't yet wiped the sleep from the corners of his eyes.

"I've just brought 'old 97' down from Amarillo, and boy howdy! you should have seen the snow. It was stacked three feet deep on the tracks!"

"Why I left Amarillo two hours ago, and there wasn't a cloud in the sky," said the salesman.

"Don't give me that," said our engineer. "It was snowing so bad I couldn't see past my nose!"

"Are you calling me a liar?"

"I sure am if you say it wasn't snowing — I never saw —"

The salesman swung a right and decked the poor man. Hickman pushed the salesman back and said, "Hold everything! I doubt he's ever been to Amarillo. He's our town half-wit!" The salesman almost cried.

Later on, business slackened at the feed store, and they told our friend they would have to let him go. He shook hands with everyone and went home.

The next morning he was back — sweeping out the store room. The boss told him he wasn't working there any more.

"The hell I'm not! This is my job and nobody is gonna fire me — so stuff it!" They let him keep working.

One of his fondest hang-ups was the fire wagon. Every time the fire wagon came by on its way to a fire, he swung on the back and went along. The city council passed an ordinance that he couldn't ride any more — too dangerous. It didn't do any good. He swung on every time it went by.

Another fellow walked around town picking up cans, bottles, or anything he might sell. He put them in a burlap bag and swung it over his shoulder. While he walked, he sang at the top of his voice. You could hear him for a country mile. One day he would sing opera — the next, country and western — the next, old ballads — and sometimes he'd play big band. He could imitate the sounds of all the horns, and when he needed drums or cymbals, he'd bang the sack against his legs.

The first time I heard him, I thought a parade was coming. I asked a friend what it was. "That's old Jolly Roger," he answered.

Jolly Roger made so much noise that the police told him to stop singing while in town. He stopped all right, but he started imitating the fire siren. This caused a lot of trouble — as the volunteer firemen would run off and leave their jobs. The police told Jolly Roger to go back to his singing and lay off the fire whistle. He sang louder than ever, and one day he sang "That Old Gang of Mine Is Breaking Up." There wasn't a dry eye on Main Street.

There was a red-haired guy who had a hairlip as big as a cow's hoof. A few of us were standing on the curb in front of the theatre where the original "King Kong" was showing. Red came out, and his eyes looked like he had just escaped from a hanging. I asked him how he liked the picture. "Dod damn!" That's all I ever heard him say. I think those were his only words.

Another fellow was called "Big Thunder." He had really been diving into the shallow end of the pool. His one big worry was wondering what caused rain. When a rainstorm would come, "Big Thunder" would dash out to the middle of the street, look straight up and try to figure out where it was coming from. He'd almost strangle. Someone would finally go rescue him and bring him inside.

“Big Thunder” once said, “It’s strange that ever’ time it rains, it’s real cloudy. If it would just rain once on a clear day, I might see where the hell it’s coming from!”

“Short Arm” Baxter was yet another strange case. The poor guy was born with short arms, and they didn’t grow with his body. You’ve all heard of the guy who never reached for the check. They say he had short arms and deep pockets — could never get his money out. Well, “Short Arm” Baxter couldn’t reach his pants pockets. He always wore a shirt with a pocket to keep his folding money in. He wore his house key around his neck on a long chain. When he changed a dollar, he’d put the change in his mouth so it wouldn’t spill out of his shirt pocket.

One day he was window shopping and a friend walked up behind him and greeted him with a slap on the back. “Short Arm” almost went into convulsions. His friend thought he was choking to death. At last, “Short Arm” got his breath — and just in time. He was turning purple. “Goddamn it, Burt — you just made me swallow 98c!”

9

If you’re the least bit timid, or squeamish about violence, it may be better if you pass this episode by. This is for the stout-hearted only! I got all good-pimply when it happened, and I still have a chill when I think of it now.

In the roaring twenties, we all thought we were the Cat’s meow! We wore bell-bottom britches, big, bright striped silk shirts with a different colored detachable collar. We slicked our hair down with quarts of oil and parted it in the middle. We wore one-piece B.V.D.’s.

A young man, who worked at the railroad shops, out-duded us all. He was a brazen bastard. He’d even walk the streets, in broad daylight, with low-quarter shoes on! He wore a wrist watch and had the longest cigaret holder in town. He liked to say, “My doctor told me to stay as far away from cigs as I can — ha! ha!”

This dude had a good-looking girl friend. She had a gorgeous build — all the soft and round parts in just the right places. She had

golden hair cascading down to her fully rounded hips, and had the biggest cornflower blue eyes you ever saw. They were together almost every night. He never took her to a movie or a dance, but headed straight out to Ross's pasture. He was efficient, though. He carried a mattress, pillow, and plenty of towels in the back of his car. He even had clothes hangers to hang their clothes up in a tree — he went first class all the way. Just before they would reach a climax, he would whisper in her ear, "We'll get married soon, and we can do this in our very own beddy-by!" He kept promising her a big wedding — but he always had a good excuse as to why they couldn't get married just yet. She finally came to the awful truth — this jerk was giving her a screwing more ways than one!

So, one nice summer evening they made their happy way out to Ross's pasture and found their favorite spot. No cow droppings near to smell up the place — no deep grass to hide a rattlesnake — and no bright moon to spotlight them. He lay out the mattress so their heads would be slightly downhill — better leverage that way — placed his shirt, pants and B.V.D.'s on a hanger and hung it from a limb. He placed her little frilly dress on a hanger and hung it beside his pants. "Everything of ours is always together," he laughed.

He gently slipped her panties off, folded them neatly, and placed them beside the pillow. Then they went through their little ritual. He kissed both ears and her neck, which always made her squirm and giggle — then both her breasts, and a string of kisses down to her navel.

Now he was ready. He took his position. She drew up her knees and put her legs across his buttocks. Little did the happy, innocent lover know he was about to get the coup de grace! She put her soft little hands down to his private and gave it a playful little tug with her left hand. He smiled with sheer delight. Then, in her right hand, she held a safety razor blade and damned near cut his joy stick off with one good slash!

The stars fell, the world turned over, his mouth formed a scream, but nothing came out but gobs of saliva! He managed to get to the car somehow — a fountain of blood spilling out on the green grass, the running board, and on the seat. He took one of his precious towels and made a tourniquet of sorts on the stub that was left. He had left the keys in the car — always ready for a fast getaway.

She stood watching the car lights fade in the distance. She wiped her hands on his hanging clothes, dressed, and started walking the two miles back to town.

He passed out in front of the hospital, his head on the horn. An attendant came out to hush the noise and found a naked man in a

bloody car that looked like a hog had been butchered in it. The doctors worked all night. In a week he was able to sit up and take solid nourishment. They took him to Ft. Worth to a specialist. He never returned to Childress.

I couldn't have said it better than some wag at the main barber shop — "I'll bet wherever he is, he's called 'Shorty'!"

For several years after this tragedy no Childress man or boy — married or single — ever went to bed with a woman without first making her place her hands against the wall, and giving her a good shakedown. Then, when they crawled in the hay, she had to clasp her hands above her head and hold them there throughout!

10

What bugs me is having someone say, "Miss Huckleberry was my second grade teach," or somebody else declare that, "Mrs. Threadbare was mean to us fourth graders, but Miss Rockbottom always let me dust the erasers!" Heck fire! I can't remember the name of one single teacher I had in grade school. I passed by them so fast it seems like I was on a carousel. Some years I attended as many as five different schools — and hardly ever less than three. Some towns we moved back to several times, so those kids I got to know by their first names. All together I must have shot the breeze with several thousand kids.

Every town had a few kids whose names I do remember. They stood out from the herd somehow. They had some outstanding quality that put them tall in the saddle. Either that, or they were so full of the devil that nobody could forget them. They were really the most interesting.

I knew one kid in Ranger, Texas, who would pick up anything that wasn't bolted down! He'd ride around on his bicycle and spot a woman doing a washing out in her back yard. He'd go in the house and search her purse. He told me of a lady who walked in the house and caught him in the front room.

"What are you doing in my house, young man?"

"Who are you — are you Mrs. Dodge's sister?"

"I don't know any Mrs. Dodge!"

“Dadgum it! I wish Pa would buy me some glasses. Teacher said if I don’t get some, I may go blind.” Then he bumped into a chair. The lady gave him a piece of cake and a glass of milk.

I was in Ft. Worth once and met him on the street.

“How come you’re here?” I asked.

“Oh, some guys caught me searching their pants at a swimming hole — so I took a wet well rope and whipped myself on down the road.”

A few days later he was picked up by the cops.●

“Do you have a job?”

“Sure, I have a job! I’m a Christmas tree decorator and only work once a year!”

They sent him to Gatesville Reformatory. When he was paroled, he was told not to leave the state. Three days later he was in California.

The law was breathing down his neck, so he joined the Army. I met him twenty years later in Hawaii. He was a warrant officer. He had educated himself in the Army and had a spotless record.

I’ll bet I’ve been vaccinated for smallpox more than anyone. I’ve had gallons of the stuff poured in me. If a smallpox germ ever got into my body, the poor thing would drown. Whenever I went to a new school, I would have to be vaccinated. They’d give me a certificate. I’d take it home and promptly lose the damn thing. Then three weeks later, I’d be in a new school — and here came more vaccine. I never once could produce proof that I’d been scratched. It got so when I entered a new school I’d go in the front door with my sleeve rolled up. The hell of the whole business was that I’d already had small pox!

I had a beautiful case in Wichita Falls. I was sicker than a horse for about a week, then broke out solid. What got me was the pox on the bottom of my feet. When I had to go to the bathroom, it felt like walking on marbles.

I was scared stiff the whole time. Every town had a pest house about two miles out in the country. Sometimes they would send people with contagious diseases out there. I had nightmares about being locked up in one of those awful places. I had passed several of them during our travels, and they always looked like old, beat-up haunted houses. I figured they had dead people stacked to the rafters.

When I got in the Army, here came the glass tube again. After the first one, they gave me my record to carry back to my company. I

wrote "Immu" on it and signed my initials — BGR — where the doctor was supposed to initial it. That stopped that bull! So I confess to the War Department right here and now — I forged my damn record. So sue me!

Speaking of the Army — I had a ball. If you are being shot at — or are shooting at — it's plain miserable. To me the Army was one great big sack of fun. My philosophy has been that if a situation comes up, take care of it right then! If you do, you'll always know how it came out. If you put it off, you may never do it — and you'll never know what you missed.

I was drawing a syndicated comic strip, "Sparky Watts," when World War II started. I kept the radio on all the time while I worked. Listening to how the Japs were treating our guys was hard to take, so I put the stopper in my ink bottle and enlisted. I figured I'd already had a good life, so maybe they'd bump me off instead of some kid who had yet to have a hand full of soft and round.

They herded a bunch of us on a flat-bottomed barge and chugged out to a little island just off the tip of Manhattan. There we stripped down naked before God and a line of doctors. They looked in our ears, our noses, our mouths, and anything else they could open up. Later I heard a good story about those line-ups. A young recruit, naked of course, was going down the line of doctors. When he stepped in front of one doctor, he kept trying to push his erected private down. The doctor watched for a moment and said, "Son, if I had one like that, I'd be proud. I wouldn't be trying to hide it."

"I'm not trying to hide it, Doc. I'm trying to get rid of it. It belongs to this son-of-a-bitch behind me!"

They declared all of us to be fit as fiddles. They wanted men — lots of men. If a doctor looked in your ear and couldn't see light coming through, you were stamped ready to go. The last thing they did was line us up and give us a "short arm" inspection for VD. Then we dressed and were herded back to New York, up to Penn Station, and were put on a train for Yaphank, Long Island.

It was dark when we arrived. The first thing they did was line us up on the platform and tell us to drop our pants. Then a doctor came down the line with a flashlight — giving us another "short arm." I heard one new soldier ask the doc, "Who th' hell do you figure we might have caught it from — the damn conductor?"

Right away I knew this was going to be a fun trip. It took less than a day to change that thought. I didn't know it then, but I was put in a guinea-pig outfit. They held us until they could fill a battalion of potential officers. The delay was terrible. I wanted to shoot the hell out of somebody — anybody — I was mad!

Camp Upton was a staging center. You couldn't believe the number of men coming in and leaving. A new soldier would arrive in the morning, or whatever. They'd give him an IQ test, a mechanical aptitude test, his first shots, a sack of clothes, and put him on a train heading south.

Somebody had to feed all these people as they passed through. I was one who wasn't going anywhere — so I pulled KP every day from sun-up to exhaustion! Man! This wasn't anything like pushing a pencil — this was work. I was ready to go over the hill the first week.

I met a fellow by the name of Roggenkamp. He, too, was being held for possible commission. We buddied up, and one night we were sitting in a little room in our barracks. All the men had gone to bed — exhausted from the long, grueling day. They had been stabbed with needles — pushed and pulled from early morning. I remember it was pouring rain. Roggy said, "What can we do now? I'm fed up with reading."

"Let's go in and give all those silly bastards a shot!" I suggested.

So Roggy went outside and wet his handkerchief with rain water. He went into the dark barracks, and I used the most authoritative voice I could muster:

"ALL YOU MEN PUT YOUR RIGHT ARM OUT FROM UNDER THE COVER!"

Sixty right arms came out. We started at the first cot. Roggy would swab the arm with the wet cloth, then I would pinch the hell out of it. Some guys took it like men, and some flinched like I had stuck a red hot poler on 'em. We went down one side and back on the other. Not one man ever uttered a word or asked what the shot was for. When we finished, I said, "Put your arms back under the cover, and go to sleep." Back went the arms, and I heard sixty men give sighs of relief!

I've often wondered what response they got when they told someone about that — "and some doctor came in and gave us shots while we were still in bed!" Surely no one would ever believe it.

Finally — after 35 days — we were loaded on a troop train and headed for South Carolina. The ride was pretty dull. Crap games went on night and day. I was put in a lower bunk with an older man. He said that he was a retread from World War I. He was a German, and had been a machine gunner in the German Army. "This is something," he said. "Last time I was shooting hell out of Americans — this time I'll be shooting hell out of Germans! I think somebody is crazy!"

The next morning, a team of men came through the train. One gave us paper plates. The others carried big containers of scrambled eggs, sausage and bread. They filled our plates. The last guy came along with a little cardboard box. "Okay, men. How about a little something for the cook?" I gave 50c. I found out later that you don't pay Army cooks! I'll bet the collector was some jerk from the next car. A smart boy could come out of the Army richer than bull manure.

They unloaded us at Camp Croft, near Spartansburg, South Carolina. We were lined up alongside the train. You guessed it — some sergeant in a loud voice gave the order — "Drop your pants!"

We shouldered our bags of belongings and were marched about a mile. Soldiers along the way, who I imagine had been there a day ahead of us, yelled, "You'll be sorry! You'll be sorry!"

When we got to our company area, we were assigned alphabetically to different platoons. Roggenkamp was still by my warm side. So were Rose, Rossiter, Randi, Roth, Rowlands, Rowasky — you name it.

The next morning, before daylight, an ear-piercing whistle popped our eyelids open. Our sergeant came through yelling, "DROP YOUR COCKS, AND GRAB YOUR SOCKS — HIT TH' DECK!" It was okay the first morning, but the second and third were murder. My feet were so sore I could hardly stand my socks.

Don't let anybody kid you — our training was hard. Every week we would be marched to some building, and, one by one, be taken before a board of officers to be interviewed. I remember one man came out of the interview and sat down next to me. "What did they ask you?" I asked.

"You'd never believe it," he answered. "They asked me what a bale of cotton weighs! How would I know? I never saw a lousy bale of cotton!" If that's what they ask, I thought, I'm in like flynn.

When I went in, I was set down in front of six officers. No one said anything for what seemed like an hour. They all just looked at me while a colonel read a sheet of paper. When they ask me about the cotton, I thought, I'll tell them five hundred and twenty-three pounds and fourteen ounces. I'll bet none of these clowns will know the difference.

Finally, the colonel looked up. "I see you drew 'Sparky Watts' and also worked on 'Smilin' Jack' — right?"

"Yes, sir, that's correct, sir."

Then they all started asking questions: "Do you know the guy who draws 'Smokey Stover,' 'Gasoline Alley,' 'Terry and the Pirates' — how much money does Zack Mosley make?" We talked about cartooning for half an hour — nothing about whether or not I thought I'd make a good officer.

Finally, I went out and rejoined my friends. "What the hell did they ask you?" they queried.

"They asked me what a cotton gin weighed. I told 'em about nine hundred tons, give or take a few pounds."

Our basic infantry training was finally finished. Most of the guys were sent to Ft. Benning Officer Candidate School. I was sent to Ft. Hood, Texas, to become a tank destroyer officer! Like a nut, I wanted to be in the infantry — not a tank jockey. Hell's bells! A guy could get killed in one of those buckets. I wanted to be out in the open where I could run and dodge!

On the way to Texas, we had to change trains in New Orleans. Another guy and I found we could miss the train and catch a later one that night and still get to Hood on time. So we started out to see which bar on Bourbon Street served the best drinks. By night we didn't much care if we went to Texas or not. An M.P. put us on the train and told us to stay put.

We were standing in the vestibule between two cars having another for the road when we rolled into Baton Rouge. The step platform had been opened on the station side. The door was open on the other side to make it a little cooler. A sailor Shore Patrolman walked by, and we invited him to have a drink. He climbed aboard, had a drink, then another and another. We asked him to come along with us.

"I sure wish I could. This burg is no place for a sailor."

While we were talking, the train started.

"Holy cow! I've gotta get off!"

With that, he saluted us and stepped off backwards on the wrong side. It must have been thirty feet down to the cobblestone street. We both rushed to the door to see, and he looked like he was doing cartwheels down the street. The last we saw of him he was spread out on the cobbles like he was nailed to a cross. My new friend and I shook hands and took a solemn vow to never, ever tell that to anyone. The poor sailor must be dead, and they might think us Army dudes pushed him off of the train.

Officer Candidate School is something else. They started tightening the screws the first day and didn't let up. We double-timed everywhere we went. I almost forgot what walking was. We would go to the latrine in the morning and wipe that night. At last I understood why they called us 90-day wonders! — It was a wonder we had any brains left after 90 days. Our class started with 150 men. When we graduated, there were only 75. Some men went to the company commander and asked to be sent back to their old outfits. Others were eliminated because they couldn't cut the mustard. I made it because obviously, **SOMEBODY MADE A MISTAKE!**

The general stood on the stage and gave us a pep talk —

“Now come forward, one by one, and receive your commissions. You are being made an officer and a **GENTLEMAN** by Act of Congress!”

Haw! If Congress only knew they'd change their tune. My Father had come from Ft. Worth to see me graduate. I let him pin my new



Camp Croft, S.C., 1942 -- Left to right, Private Boody Rogers, Corporal ?, Privates Sherman and Rogenkamp.

brass bars on my “gentlemanly” shoulders. I think the old man was proud.

It was a custom to give a dollar to the first soldier who saluted you. It was a ready gold mine for some soldiers who knew a class graduated each week. A bunch of them were waiting outside, and they began saluting like crazy. I gave one a dollar and said, “If you ever salute me again, I want that buck back!”

Dad took several of us to Ft. Worth. We all bought whiskey before we got on the train. The conductor saw a new bunch of fresh “looies” come each week, and I guess he knew what was going to happen. He put us in a car to ourselves.

We were so damned relieved that it was all over. You can’t imagine the release of pressure unless you’ve been through it. We were all friends, and as the bottles went dry, we were better friends — even slobbering brothers.

We had to change trains at Oklahoma City for St. Louis. Some of the “gentlemen” had to be carried across to the new train, and I doubt they ever knew they had made the switch. Later the next morning, an officer buddy woke me to come to breakfast. When I awoke, I had my head on a poor old gray-haired lady’s shoulder. I felt awfully sorry, and asked her pardon. The nice old gal said, “That’s all right, soldier boy. I’m glad to do my part — God bless you.” I’ll bet she sure wasn’t blessing my breath that she’d been smelling all night!

During breakfast in the dining car, I was sitting with my back to the engine. We were slowing down for Topeka, Kansas. Just as I was lifting my cup of coffee, the train went off the track and came to a sudden, jolting stop. I threw the hot coffee over my shoulder and it went all over a lady in back of me. “Oh, my gosh, lady, I’m so sorry — but I — ”

“That’s all right, sir — no harm done! You just be careful when you go overseas.” This officer business was getting better.

I spent my leave time in New York with my lovely wife — then had to go back to Hood. Mary was to follow as soon as she could store the furniture.

I went back by way of Chicago. My old classmates were waiting in the station when I arrived. We didn’t waste a moment. We started making the bars and strip joints on Clark Street. Sometime during the night, we were all poured on the train for Texas. We rode the bar car all the way.

I’ll never forget the only guy I ever saw actually drink himself under the table. He claimed he was the Coca Cola distributor for Kansas. His son was about to be drafted, and he was wanting all the

advice he could get on what his boy could do to better himself in the Army. Of course, we were all experts, especially since he was buying the drinks. After about an hour of throwing them down the hatch, he raised his hand and said, "That's all, gents! — then he slid, slow motion, under the table.

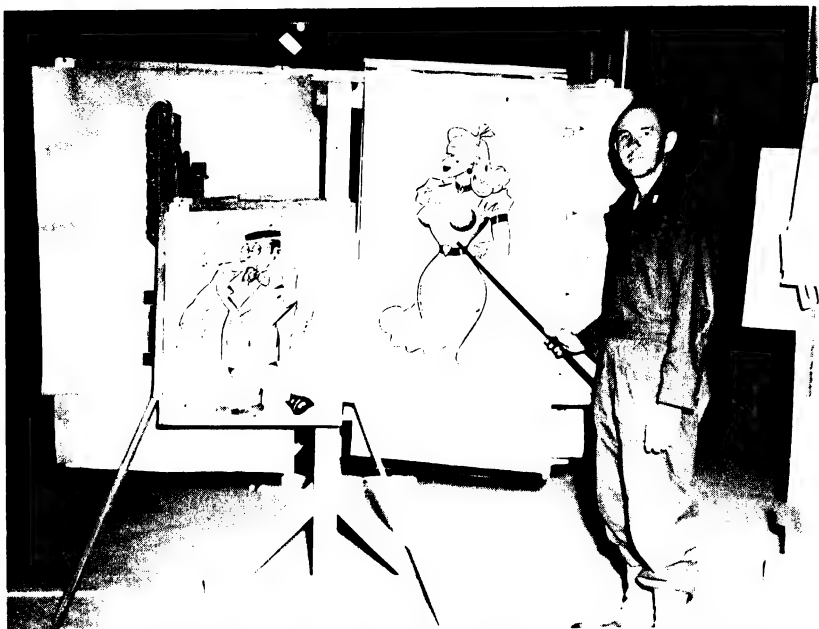
I was put on an instruction team at Ft. Hood. I taught camouflage, aircraft identification, and field sanitation to a complete regiment. We didn't have many training charts then, so I painted a few for myself. I'd flip the charts to illustrate the subject I was teaching, and ever so often I'd flip a sheet and it would be a picture of a nude girl in full pink color. The troops would laugh and whistle. It kept them awake.

Many years later, a big fellow walked into my store in Phoenix. He asked if I was the same Boody Rogers who had been at Ft. Hood. I said I was.

"I thought so. You used to be my instructor."

"Don't hit me!" I threw up my hands in mock horror.

"Don't worry," he said. "When we read on the schedule that you were going to be our teacher, we knew we were going to have some fun."



At Camp Hood I made some of my charts to teach camouflage — partly to keep the soldiers awake, and also to demonstrate that some things look like what they ain't.

Next, I was a platoon leader — then company executive. When the troops finished their 13-week basic training, they were given ten days leave. Then they reported back to be assigned to some combat outfit. All the troops had gone home. The non-coms and officers were sitting around twiddling their thumbs until the new recruits showed up. Our battalion commander thought it would be nice to have some refresher courses — unless we had some duty. So the next morning we were to march to a nice, shady sector and have a class on the nomenclature of machine guns.

All of the sergeants suddenly found some duty they had to attend to — so when we started to form up for the march, there were twelve officers and one corporal. Someone asked who was going to march us. “Well, we can all march the corporal, or we can let the corporal march us.” The fellows thought it would be fun — so the corporal was told to fall us in and march us off.

He did. We marched out to the main street, did a column right, flanked across the road, then by the right flank, harch! We were on our way — marching tall and keeping a snappy beat.

Just as we were really stepping it out, the regimental commander came out of the officers’ mess and was sauntering over to his office. We were almost past him when he yelled, “Halt that detail!”

That scared the socks off the corporal, so he didn’t say halt, go to hell, or nothing. We all came to a halt on our own. The old man, looking at the poor corporal, shouted, “Why didn’t you pay your respects to your commanding officer?”

“I didn’t see you, sir.”

“What’s your rank?”

“Corporal, sir!”

“Corporal!” The old man almost had a stroke. “What do you mean, corporal? What’s a goddamn corporal doing marching a bunch of officers?”

By this time we had all turned to face the colonel who was standing in the ditch beside the road. “Who’s the ranking officer in this rag-tail outfit?”

Nobody spoke. Nobody knew for sure who was the ranking officer. We were all second Loosies. Finally, I said, “Sir, may I speak?”

“Speak!” and he lit in on the corporal again.

“Sir, it wasn’t the corporal’s fault. We ordered him to march us.”

The old man thought this over — then said, “All of you skid-row bums come to my office — and bring the corporal, too. You’ve

already made him your superior.” We all marched behind the colonel.

A little lieutenant from Arkansas was marching beside me, and he had just been recommended for promotion. He whispered, “What do you suppose this will do to my promotion?”

“Promotion, my foot! You’ll be drummed out of the Army and made to walk back to Arkansas.”

Our punishment was getting restricted to camp for the weekend.

I saw the colonel a year later in Hawaii. I reminded him of the episode. He laughed and said, “I sure scared hell out of you men, didn’t I?” He was a classmate of “Blood and Guts” Patton.

Our Arkansas boy’s promotion came through, and he was now a first lieutenant. He didn’t drink — he didn’t cuss or smoke. He didn’t do anything that a good Christian shouldn’t do. Neither did his beautiful wife.

About a dozen officers and families lived in Hamilton, Texas, a little village about 25 miles from Hood. It was one of the friendliest towns I’ve ever lived in. We Army guys had the run of the place. All of the country club members had either been drafted or gone off to work in war plants. They let us have the club on weekends. They had a juke box, and the greens-keeper was an old cowboy who wore boots and a big hat. He would keep our tables loaded with ice and chaser, and tend to the record machine.

One weekend most of the officers had duty. Mary and I and another couple were going on a picnic. The Arkansas lieutenant had to remain at Hood, so we invited his wife to go along with us. The girls spread the lunch while Arch Hooper and I made four martinis. We asked the Arkansas girl if she would like a lemonade. She said that would be nice, so with our bodies shielding our dirty deed, we poured three jiggers of gin in the lemonade. I think it was the first drink she’d ever had.

In a little while, her eyes lit up like a Christmas tree. “Shay,” she said, “That was the best drink I ever had. Gimme anusher!”

“Coming up.” And we poured another stiff one. Our girls took her home and put her to bed. The next day her little husband told me his wife must have gotten food poisoning. “She was erping all morning.”

“I’m sorry,” I said. “If there’s anything I can do, please ask!”

After all, I thought us officers and gentlemen must stick together.

If you think this book is rambling, you’re right. I’ve been rambling all my born days. My Dad was a Rambler, so just maybe I

come by it naturally. Dad would put in a business, work up the trade, then sell while business was good. He said that if you waited until business started going down, you couldn't swap the thing for a skinny hog.

So, now let's go back to when I was still in Officer Candidate School. One cold morning they marched my company out to a field and sat us down on some wooden bleachers. Several officers were there to give us a demonstration of a new weapon. A young shave-tail walked out in front of us holding a long tube that looked like a down drain from a gutter with a Thompson machine gun handle.

"Now, men," he began. "This morning we are going to show you the weapon that will stop Hitler's tanks. This rascal is top secret. You must not write to your mother about it; you must not tell your lady friend about it — in bed or out — in other words, don't mention it to anybody. Do you understand?"

We all nodded that we understood. Boy, Howdy! Now we're getting somewhere. We were on the very inside of our government. "Okay, this weapon is called a bazooka. It fires a rocket that will go through the hide of a tank, any place, except perhaps the front heavy armor. When it penetrates the tank, it also takes inside parts of the tank's steel plate — and the whole mess will ricochet around in there until the crew will look like chipped beef."

Wow! we thought. This is it. Won't those Nazis be surprised when us killers get after 'em? There was an old tank sitting off about fifty yards. The young lieutenant shouldered the bazooka. Another officer shoved the rocket in the back end, then slapped the shooter on the back to let him know that all was ready. He took aim, and bang! He knocked hell out of the tank. He also dropped the bazooka like it was red hot. All the officers ran toward him. We didn't know why all the excitement — the guy did good — he sure punctured his target.

He had his hands covering his face. Then he turned around. Blood was running out between his fingers and dripping down on his coveralls. They led the poor guy over to a jeep and took him off. None of us had spoken a word, but we were sure thinking plenty. When the officers were out of hearing distance, we all started talking at once.

"Holy Christ, if they think I'm gonna shoot that thing, they're out of their cotton-picking minds!"

"What kind of weapon is it? It'll make casualties outta th' whole damn Army!"

"The Germans won't beat us — we'll whip ourselves!"

"No wonder they don't want us to tell anybody about it — we'd be the biggest laughingstock around!"

One of the officers came back and told us what had happened. "It's unfortunate that you had to see the first accident we've ever had with this weapon. It must have had a faulty charge of powder. All of the powder is supposed to burn before the rocket leaves the tube, but this time all of the powder hadn't burned. It flew back sparks and blasted the officer's face."

I saw hundreds of rounds fired after than, and I never saw it happen again.

Everyone has heard stories about all the stinking Army officers who didn't have sense enough to come in out of the rain. All they thought about was a cold bottle for themselves, and their men could drink out of a buffalo track if they could find one. I just flat don't believe it. There have to be exceptions, of course. The Army had to make leaders by the thousands, and quickly — out of ribbon clerks, cartoonists or whatever came out of the woodwork. You hardly ever ran into a West Pointer. We were all civilians trying to act like soldiers. By and large, though, all of the hundreds of officers I had dealings with were very concerned about their men. We knew that we had the best of all deals, so we tried to better the "grunt" any way we could. Of course, we could move around — so we could get in the shade more often than the troops. There were just too many of them to get under one tree.

Most all of the officers had been buck-ass privates at one time, so they knew the thinking — and the things a private had to put up with. Why they called a soldier a "private" always did puzzle me. He might have been a private citizen before he got in the Army, but once in — forget it! First, he was in a room with a hundred other men — naked as the day he was born — while a bunch of doctors eyeballed him. Then he bathed with guys; he slept with a roomful of guys; he picked up cigaret butts and other trash with a hundred other guys. He went to the bathroom, and twenty guys were sitting alongside him. By no stretch of the imagination should he be called a private — he's a PUBLIC!

Now to make a point of all this, I must tell you about Captain Scoggins. He was my first company commander after I was commissioned. We became good friends later, but the first time he ever saw me he thought they had reached the bottom of the barrel.

"When you first reported to me, I thought you must be some bastard from New Jersey. You didn't salute, you had both breast pockets unbuttoned, and your eyes looked like they had been glued to a keyhole in a whorehouse!"

Scoggins didn't know that I had been drunk all the way from New York to Texas. I didn't know whether I was in the Army or conducting a garage sale — and cared less. I sure didn't feel like standing in front of his desk. I just wanted to lie down someplace and die!

Scoggins was a real soldier. He was a first sergeant in the regular army, and when war came they quickly made him an officer and a gentleman. He knew his weapons, he knew the rules, and he knew how to conduct himself — but he did have some strange viewpoints. He had two big hates: a queer, and anybody from New Jersey. Whenever we went on a bivouac, he trucked out a mattress for each officer. He said as long as we have to pay for our room, we got a right to use part of it. "Besides," he said, "When I was an enlisted man, I toted enough mattresses for officers to cover Hood, and I decided if I ever was an officer I was going to sleep soft."

He saw to the comfort of his men the best he could. Obviously, he couldn't take 250 mattresses out and spread them under trees. He thought it was really a waste of men's time to put them out in the bushes to live. "Good God!" he'd say. "You don't have to teach men how to sleep or eat C rations. If they get sleepy enough they can sleep leaning against a fence post or in a mudhole; if they're hungry



enough they'll eat the C ration and then eat the can for dessert — and if you don't watch them, they'll eat you!"

One night we had to take Company "A" on a hike through the woods and hills. We were supposed to be slipping up on something or other. So the order was to be quiet — no talking — no lights. We had been following a path through the woods for about 30 minutes. It was darker than the inside of old Ned's hat. Captain Scoggins passed the word back to fall out on either side of the path and to take a rest — no talking — no smoking! He came back to me and said, "Let's go up on the side of the hill and steal a smoke." We climbed up and hid behind a bush, making sure the troops didn't see us light up, then lay back to enjoy a few puffs.

We heard "B" Company coming from the other direction. It's almost impossible for 250 men to walk quietly when they are carrying a rifle, full pack, and the other equipment soldiers have to carry. It sounds like a junk wagon coming down the alley. We didn't hear a peep from our troops, but somehow they must have gotten the message to each other. When "B" troop was in the ambush, some soldier yelled, "GET'EM!" It sounded like two locomotives had run together. You could hear helmets being rung like gongs — then hitting the ground. We didn't know who was getting hit, but we could hear plenty of something hitting something and plenty of grunting.

"B" Company's captain had a lisp. He was yelling at the top of his voice, "Dod damn it, men! Cut it out! Move on! Move on!" It was getting bad. I asked the captain if we shouldn't go down and stop it.

"Hell, no!" he said. "We're trying to teach them to fight! If that captain wants his men to move on, that's his problem."

"B" Company finally got free, and as far as we could hear their captain, he was still cussing.

The next morning our company was lined up for roll call. I came out of the office and walked up and down in front of the ranks. I never before saw so many split lips, black eyes, and bruised noses in all my life. They were all grinning as much as their swollen faces and jaws would allow. Finally, I stopped, put my hands on my hips and said, "I've never seen such a beat-up bunch of bastards! Fall out and wash your ugly faces!"

Some guy yelled, "If you think we look bad, sir, you oughta see those bastards in 'B' Company!"

We were expecting our first child. I was Officer of the Guard for the weekend. I had already formed the guard, and the sergeant had

placed the guards at their posts. A runner came and told me that I was wanted on the phone. I jumped in my Jeep, and drove to Regimental Headquarters. It was my wife calling me from Hamilton. "I'm already in the hospital," she said. "It won't be long now — can you come?"

"I'll be there," I answered. I ran over to the S-1's desk and told him my situation, and asked him to get someone quick to take my place.

"It's Saturday afternoon," he said. "Almost all the fellows have already gone."

"Then get somebody who hadn't left! I'll take his place next time."

"But they're probably leaving out now. I guess you're stuck."

Any soldier knows that the fifth order of the guards reads, "I shall not quit my post unless properly relieved." To do so could mean a court martial — and in time of war, even be shot!

I took off my belt and pistol and laid it in front of him. "Then, by God, you wear it! I'm going to Hamilton! I ran to my car and really laid my ears back. I was at the hospital in 30 minutes. Mary hadn't gone into the delivery room yet, but it was only a few minutes until they wheeled her in. It was a little hospital, so I sat just outside the delivery room door, and almost twisted my helmet in two.



Toasting my Dad for being my Dad.

Then I heard a baby cry — and someone said, “It’s a girl!” That was the sweetest music I ever heard — I was finally singing with the girls.

The next Monday the Company was lined up in our Company street. I gave them “at ease” and said, “I have an announcement to make. I’m the proud Father of a new WAC named Judie.” The men all applauded. Two days later a corporal told me the men would like to see me in the Day Room. I went in, and the entire company had squeezed in there. One soldier handed me a big box — all gift-wrapped with big bows and everything. I opened it and inside was the pinkest, softest, most beautiful baby blanket I ever saw!

“Speech! Speech!” they yelled. I tried to speak, but nothing came out — I was so choked up I could hardly breathe. I stood there for a moment, then turned and got the hell out of there. I couldn’t let my men see me cry. I know they understood — they never mentioned it.

I never knew who pulled my guard duty. Nothing was ever mentioned about that, either.



11

Let's go back in time — back to 1928 to be exact. In 1928, I was more impulsive than sensible. Dad had just opened a cafe in Wink, Texas — so I returned there from art school in Chicago. In a few days, I borrowed Dad's new Packard and drove up to Childress. I proposed to an old flame, and damned if she didn't accept! Begging her pardon, that doesn't speak too highly of her intellect, either.

Anyhow, Herbert Hill was going to be my best man, and Frances Ann Scott was to be Mary's bridesmaid. I spent all my money for a ring — and had to borrow twenty bucks from Herbert. About noon we loaded in the Packard and laughed all the way to Hollis, Oklahoma. Herbert and I went to the courthouse and bought the marriage license, then started driving around town to find a preacher — any preacher.

We came to a church, and saw a red-haired guy sweeping the church steps. I asked him where we could find a pastor to perform a marriage ceremony. "You've found him, friend. Let's step into my study."

We filed into the room. While Red was putting away his broom, I gave Herbert the ring. According to the movies I'd seen, I knew the best man was supposed to fumble around trying to find it when the time came. I told Herbert not to lose it. Herbert asked, "Lose what?" Right then I knew everything was following the script — he'd probably forget where it was.

Red told us to join hands. Mary took Frances Ann's hand. I took Mary's hand, and grabbed Herbert's with my other hand. We were rowed up like we were going to play "Drop the Hanky!"

"No, no," said Red. "Just the bride and groom join hands." Then he started speaking. I knew he was speaking because I could see his lips moving. I was scared stiff. When his lips paused, Herbert nudged me in the ribs, and I said, "I do." Then more lip-moving, and he folded the book. I figured he was through, so I gave Mary our wedding salute. Boy, oh boy! At last I had my very own soft and round!



My school sweetheart, bride, critic, proof-reader and boss, Mary Norris Rogers.

I think Herbert slipped Red something — then we all dashed for the car. When we got in, I remembered the ring. “Gimme the ring, Herbert!”

“What ring?” he said. “Come on! Cut the comedy — gimme my ring!” He fumbled around going through his pockets, then finally produced the wedding band. I put it on Mary’s finger, and at last really felt married.

I called Mary’s Mother and told her that we had just been married. I guess the news was a little sudden for her — but after a few moment’s hesitation, she said, “Well, come on home.”

While we were going back to Childress, Herbert suddenly said, “Say, do you suppose that red-headed guy was really a preacher or just the janitor?”

Mary and I finally got \$300 together and lit a shuck for New York City. Good Heavens! That wouldn't even pay bus fare today — and we rode the train. We rented a room in a brownstone house on 49th Street, right where the side door of the Music Hall Theatre is now. Every basement between Fifth and Sixth Avenues was a speakeasy, and I remember that men with megaphones were riding around in taxicabs screaming, "VOTE FOR AL SMITH!"

A friend had told me that Dell Publications was starting a comic book. The offices were at 100 Fifth Avenue. I thought I'd just walk over because we were only a block from Fifth. I walked — and walked — and walked! Man! Ragtown's street was never this long. At last I came to their building. It was just before the arch in Greenwich Village.

I showed my one page of "Rock Age Roy" to the editor. He bought it! There was nothing to this cartoon business — it was a cinch. Then I did some other things — "Deadwood Gulch," "Campus Clowns," "Sancho and the Don," and some puzzle pages. Dell bought them all. We soon had enough money to eat three meals a day.

I didn't realize it then, but I was working on the first comic book ever published. It was the right idea, but the wrong format. It was more like a tabloid paper than the small comic books of today. It only lasted about a year, but, thank God, it got us started in New York City.

As usual, some funny things happened where we lived on 49th Street. It was a three-storied brown-front house, and we lived on the first floor rear — our room faced out on the alley. One building separated us from the elevated trains. When one passed by, everything in the room did the Charleston! The pictures on the walls shimmied like a bowl of jello on a frosty morn.

The only telephone was just outside our door. When it rang, the landlady would have to walk down the stairs to answer it — then call out, "Phone for Mr. Thugout," or "Phone for Miss Kitty Pink." I felt sorry for the old lady having to make those stairs so many times a day, so I offered to answer it and save her those trips. Besides, I liked to see Kitty Pink come down those stairs. She just kinda floated down, bobbing all over. Kitty worked in a burlesque house, and she had that bobbing down to a science! She would almost make you want to go beat hell out of your wife!

The phone rang plenty for Kitty, and a few jingles for Mr. Thugout, but mostly for a motion picture theatre on Broadway. The number was just one digit different, so I got at least ten calls a day asking, "What's playing?"

I checked. It was Doug Fairbanks in "The Iron Mask." So when I got a call, I'd tell 'em, "Douglas Fairbanks in 'The Iron Mask,' featuring so and so. The first show is at 10:45, etc." Then came the fun part. They'd ask the prices, so I'd say, "twenty-five cents for orchestra, fifty cents for loges, one dollar for balcony, and two-fifty for second balcony."

"Surely you have that mixed up?" they'd ask.

"NO, THAT'S CORRECT — IT'S OUR GODDAMN SHOW AND WE CAN CHARGE ANYTHING WE DAMN PLEASE!"

I should imagine I lost that theatre plenty of customers.

Our bed was a pull-down Murphy bed. It had an upright sideboard on either side to hold the bedclothes from spilling out when it was closed. One of our windows didn't have a screen, and it was just above an awning that covered the back basement door. For years I have slept on my right side, so I was facing that window. One night I awoke, and sitting in that window was the biggest, ugliest, most scarred, New York alley tomcat that I ever saw. I hollered for him to vamoose — and he jumped down on the awning and was gone. It worried me, though. That cat was big enough to sever my jugular with one bite.

The next day I took rough sketches of magazine gags around to Life, Colliers, Judge, College Humor, and any place I could get in. I was tired that night — so we went to a Horn and Hardart Automat for a bite — and so to bed. Along about two o'clock, I opened my eyes — and there sat that vicious cat again — looking straight at me. He jumped down into the room and came over to the bed. He reared up, put his paws on the bed railing, and was staring me straight in the eyes. His face wasn't six inches from mine. I was on my right side, so I lifted my left arm very slowly — I didn't want to frighten that ugly beast! When I got all set, the cat hadn't moved — I swung my fist down as hard as I could. I hit that cat right smack on top of his ugly head — KERPOW!

I came up out of bed with one big leap. Not only had I busted that cat's dome, I had also busted my wrist on the side board! The cat didn't go out the window — I saw to that. Mary jumped up and wanted to know what was happening. "It's that damned cat," I cried. "He's still in the room, and I think I've broken my arm!" We both searched — under the bed — everywhere. Finally Mary asked, "How did he get in?"

"Through the same window he was in last night — the one without the screen." Mary doubled up laughing. "You must have been dreaming," she said. "They replaced that screen today."

I sure scrambled that cat's brains, even if it was only a dream. My arm was no dream, though. I put it out of commission for a solid month.

New York was a wonderful place in the late 20's for a small-town boy and girl. We walked all over the city. Down dark streets, or on the Great White Way — it was exciting. You can never describe the thrill of knowing you were among the biggest people in the game. No suspicion of danger anywhere. To roam around now on dark streets in the city is sheer foolishness.

In our leaner days, we would sometimes go to night court. It can't be beat for drama and entertainment. We saw the dregs of the nation's largest city, and it was a good education for a cartoonist. Bud Fisher, creator of "Mutt & Jeff," once said, "When a cartoonist buys himself a pair of house slippers, he might as well look for other employment!" I tried to use that truism all my life.

One afternoon, we went to a matinee performance of Earl Carroll's Vanities. We had tickets for the back of the balcony. W. C. Fields was the star, and I was anxious to study his comedy. There weren't twenty people in the balcony that afternoon, and soon an usher leaned over my shoulder and asked if I wouldn't like to sit down on the balcony's front row.

"That would be nice," I said. So he led us down to a center aisle front seat. About twenty minutes later, he leaned over my shoulder again. "Do you like your seat?"

"Yes, this is fine."

"We always get a dollar for a nice seat like this!"

"Not this time, you don't!"

"Then you'll have to move back to your old seat!"

"No, we like it here. You moved us here and didn't say anything about money!"

"You're a tough bird, eh? How'd you like it if I dragged you out of here?"

"Look, Bud," I said. "I think you should know that I was light heavyweight champion of Arizona University. Try something, and you'll wind up in the seats below." The guy beat a hasty retreat.

After the show Mary asked if I really was the light heavyweight champ of Arizona U. "Of course not," I said. "But the story sure saves me from lots of fights."

When we moved to Great Neck, Long Island, it was a small town and we loved it. Tom Holloway, a transplant from deep in the heart of Texas, was one of our best friends. We rode with him to a party one night in his spanking new Ford roadster. About three a.m., we started home. Tom never took it out of low gear — we were doing all of five miles per hour.

“Why are you driving in low? It’ll take us ‘til daylight to get home!”

“Because,” answered Tom, “If I drive like this, the cops will never suspect that I’m drunker than a goat!”

One time in New York City, Tom found a small place to park on 42nd Street. He squeezed in between two cars. He cut and sawed — and the more he struggled, the further he got the inside wheels up on the sidewalk. Finally, he gave up and started to walk away. A cop stopped him. “Don’t you think you should move your wheels off the walk?”

“Why?” asked Tom. “Is there a law against it?”

“No,” replied the cop, “but it just looks so damned bad!”

Another car story I like concerned Zack Mosley, creator of “Smilin’ Jack” comic strip. One summer evening, Zack was riding with two friends in Manhattan. They had to go downtown to see a fellow, so when they reached the address, they parked in a space reserved for taxicabs. It was late — not a taxi in sight. The two friends went into the building. It was a warm night, so Zack got out and leaned against the car.

Along came a cab. “Okay, Mac,” the cabbie called out. “You’re in my space. Move it out!”

“No can do,” replied Zack.

“Whatta ya mean, ya no can do! Ya better move it, or I’ll hook yer bumper an’ push ya t’hell out!”

“I wouldn’t advise it!”

A squad car came by and the cabbie whistled them in. “This wise guy won’t move out of my stand.”

“Get in the car,” said the cop. Zack opened the door and slid into the back seat.

“Don’t be a comedian! Get under the wheel — let’s go!” Zack got under the steering wheel. “Come on, come on; put the key in and scram out of here!”

“I don’t have a key,” answered Zack.

“Whatta ya mean ya don’t have a key?”

“It ain’t my car!”

“It ain’t your car? Get th’ hell out of there!” Then the cop turned to the cabbie. “What’s th’ matter with you — are you nuts or something? If I was you I’d beat it before I run you in for trying to get this man to steal a car!”

Frank Beaven and Reamer Keller, two cartoonist friends of mine, loved to pull stunts to startle people. Some folks get their kicks out of a drink, or other pleasures, but Frank and Reamer got their jolts from watching the startled expressions on strangers’ faces. It was so much fun that they got me addicted.

Most cartoonists I’ve known were a little bit nuts anyhow. They have to be, because it’s a nutty business. If you aren’t batty to begin with, you stay with it long enough and you’ll become nuttier than a fruit cake!

You are thinking about story lines and gags when you’re eating, drinking, going to bed, or going to the john. If you go to the movies, you really don’t enjoy them — you’re trying to figure out how you might switch the plot around and use it in your drawings. The question most asked by new acquaintances is, “How do you get all those ideas?” My stock answer was, “Drink a quart of Scotch. You’ll be surprised at all the ideas you’ll get.”

That wasn’t true — you worked at it night and day.

The first time I ever met Frank Beaven was when he and his wife, Elise, lived in Great Neck. We went with mutual friends to their home one night. Frank sat on the couch with a newspaper draped over his head most of the evening. Occasionally, I’d catch a glimpse of his eyes watching me. He was enjoying watching my puzzled expression. I figured that this guy was ready for the looney bin — but later he became my very best friend. Being with him was more fun than going on a picnic.

One of Frank’s great delights was getting on a crowded elevator in the city. He always managed to get on last so he’d be up front in the car. When it stopped at his floor, he’d squeal like a stuck pig, and spring out the door, clutching his behind. He’d turn and stare back at the people who were as startled as he had pretended to be. The door would close and continue up. Frank would relish wondering what the people in the elevator were thinking — were they all looking at each other — trying to figure out who had goosed the guy? Was each thinking he or she might get a goose when they got off? The possibilities were unlimited.

One day we were in the cartoon editor’s office at Collier’s magazine. Frank looked out the window, and across the street was a little sandwich shop. He expressed the opinion that it might be nice

to send them some sandwiches. Mr. Carlson said, "Use my phone." Reamer called Schrafft's Restaurant, which was just around the corner. Reamer wasn't thinking sandwiches, however. He ordered two club steaks - medium rare - mushrooms sauted in wine, brie mousse with ginger crackers, two pots of tea, and finger bowls, please. He gave the address of the little sandwich shop.

Fairly soon, we saw a fellow in a white jacket pushing a serving cart laden with silver covered dishes. He found the address and pushed the cart inside. We could imagine the argument going on. In a few minutes, the man pushed the car out, looked up at the address again, rechecked his slip of paper, shrugged, and went back toward Schrafft's.

Another time, when they were in an office about twenty floors up, they could see a woman working in an office in the next building. They somehow found out the company's name — telephoned, and watched her answer the phone.

"This is the SPCA calling," they said. "It has been reported that there is a pigeon with a broken wing sitting on your window ledge. Will you please take it in until we can come pick it up?"

The woman opened the window, looked all around, then closed the window and returned to her desk. They waited about five minutes, then gave her another call. "Lady, this is the SPCA again. It has been reported that you pushed that little wounded pigeon off the ledge, and let it fall to its death! Shame, shame on you!"

She came to the window and saw them watching her from across the way. She laughed, put her thumb to her nose, and waved them a greeting.

One Hallowe'en night, Mary and I were helping Frank and Elise pass out treats to the cute little tricksters. About midnight, the big kids started ringing the doorbell for a handout. Frank said, "Those bums are big enough to be driving trucks. It's stupid for them to be beggin' for a stick of candy."

We made our plans. He went upstairs to a window just over the front door. When the bell rang, I would open the door. "Trick or treat," they growled. "What would you like?" I asked. "Anything you want to give," they'd say. With that, Frank would drop a big paper sack full of water on their heads.

When I returned from the wars, the Beavens were living in an old, pre-revolutionary stone house near Allendale, New Jersey. We stayed with them for a few days until we could find us a place to live. One evening, Frank asked me to help him carry a porch swing across

the road to a neighbor's house. I was still wearing my uniform, so when he introduced me to his neighbor, I got a crushing handshake. "Always glad to see a guy come back alive!" he said.

"Yes," I said. "Nobody ever tried very hard to shoot me."

Now I have a coloration on my hands where the pigment has disappeared from just above my knuckles to my fingertips. When my hands are brown from the sun, the fingers remain white.

In the course of our conversation, Frank asked me what was wrong with my hands. "Oh", I said. "It's some form of leprosy that I picked up in the islands. They don't think it's contagious, however!"

"Holy Gee!" said Frank. "Try not to touch too many things in my house!"

The neighbor looked like someone had just given him a slap with a brick. He started rubbing his hand up and down on his pants leg. As we were walking back across the road, Bev laughed, "I'll bet he's in the house soaking his hand in gasoline right now!"

One day Frank and I were walking down a street in New York. We passed a confectionery which had a big sign in the window — "Try our delicious banana milkshakes!"

"Did you ever have one of those?" asked Bev.

"No, but I like bananas. Let's try one."

We went in. They mashed up a banana and made a milkshake out of the awful looking mess. It was a thick goo, but I finally got it down. We walked out of the joint and leaned against a lamp pole. "I think I'm sick." Bev agreed, "Let's both throw up together and see if we can stop traffic."

As I was driving home from the city one day, I stopped at a little confectionery in Little Neck, Long Island. It was owned and operated by some Germans who made their own ice cream — and they made the best sodas in the world. As I was slurping a cool one, a man came in and sat down a couple of stools away. He gave his order to the blonde German working the fountain. "Give me a Bromo-Seltzer flavored ice cream soda."

The fountain man didn't bat an eye. He poured in an ample dose of Bromo, spooned in the ice cream, then shot a fine stream of carbonated water to it. It foamed over the top and ran down the sides of the glass. The man gulped it down, smacked his lips, wiped his chin, paid, and walked out.

I was amazed. "That was the first time I ever saw anyone drink a Bromo ice cream soda. Do you sell many of those?"

"Not too many," answered the soda dispenser. "That was the first one I ever heard of!"

There are some things which happen that no one can explain. One of the strangest that I can recall concerns the time that Zack Mosley's cousin got married.

Zack had about twenty guests. The marriage vows were spoken in the living room — then everyone rushed down to the basement to the game room — and the bar. The scotch and bourbon had a race to see which could run out first. We toasted the bride, the groom, each other, all the ships at sea, and even the garbage man.

About midnight, the groom decided that he and his new bride should split. So we all stacked into cars and gave them a chase. We went through Queens on wrong-way streets — we made U-turns on the parkway — anything we had to do to keep the bride and groom in sight. Finally, the lovebirds outsmarted us by going down a dark street without their lights. They turned a corner some place and got away.

We all returned to Zack's to retrieve stray coats, pocketbooks, and anything we might have left during the fast exit.

And here comes the part about the unexplainable happening. During the party, a rug had been rolled up and placed against the wall. Of course, at a wedding reception, everyone had to tickle-toe with the bride. We thought we'd help tidy up the joint, so a couple of guys took hold of the rug and gave it a pop to unroll it.

To everyone's utter amazement, out rolled a naked woman! She never spoke to anyone. She slipped on an overcoat and staggered out the door. Nobody had ever seen her before, and as far as I know, nobody ever saw her again.

One fine morning as Mary and I were motoring to the grocery store, we saw Don Oatley standing on a corner talking to a uniformed policeman. Don was a reporter for the Great Neck News, and was one of our party group.

I pulled up close to them and stopped. "Pardon me, fellows; can you tell me how to go to Amarillo, Texas?"

Don stepped over to the car, and said, "Yes, I can. You go straight ahead to Middleneck Road, turn left, and cross the bridge. Continue on through Little Neck until you come to Northern Parkway. Turn left on it, and go on to Queen's Boulevard, cross 59th Street bridge into Manhattan, then turn down town to the Holland Tunnel, under the Hudson, and take Highway 22 to Pittsburgh. Continue on to Columbus, Ohio — then to St. Louis. Take 66 south through Missouri, cut across the corner of Kansas into Oklahoma. Turn west

at Oklahoma City, and continue on Highway 66 to Amarillo, Texas — you can't miss it!"

We thanked him and drove on to the grocery store. In about 30 minutes we came back by, and I'll be darned if Don and the cop weren't still yakking. I pulled up again and asked if they could tell me the way to Amarillo.

"You bet," said Don. Then he went into the entire business again. We thanked him and drove off.

The cop told Don, "That poor man hasn't got as much chance as a snowball in hell of ever finding Amarillo, Texas! He can't even get out of Great Neck!"

We had gotten a couple of weeks ahead on "Smilin' Jack," and Zack and I thought we should take a little vacation. "Have you seen Niagara Falls?"

"No," I answered, "but I was once swept over the dam at Crystal Falls, Texas." That's a dam about fifteen feet high on the Clear Fork of the Brazos River.

"I hear Niagara is a little higher than that," said Zack, "besides, I want to try out my new Ford."

Heaters were not standard equipment at that time, and it was the middle of November.

"Let's heat some bricks like we used to do in Oklahoma." So we got about a dozen bricks and heated them as hot as a kitchen oven would get them. Then we took old newspapers and tied each brick into a neat package. We placed the hot packages on the car floor to keep our wive's feet cozy.

Off we went, past the Finger lakes and on to Buffalo. We spent the night in Buffalo and drove up to the Falls the next morning. We looked at the Falls from every angle on the American side. I tried to take some pictures, but the camera lens froze and wouldn't click. So we settled for a few postcards.

Our little packages of bricks had gotten colder than a witch's heart, so we tossed them into the trunk of the car. Then we went across the river and took on some Canadian cooking. We bought some souvenirs, then watched the Falls from the Canadian side. It was a beautiful sight with all the colored floodlights on it. I can see why it's a great honeymoon place. However I've heard of some honeymooners who stayed there a week and haven't seen Niagara Falls yet!

We came back across the bridge to the United States, and were stopped by a customs officer. "Did you buy anything to declare while over in Canada?"

"No, sir, we just had dinner."

"May I look in the trunk?" the officer asked. Zack handed me the keys, so I got out and unlocked the trunk. He looked, and all he saw were those neatly wrapped packages.

"What's in the packages?" he asked.

"Bricks," I said.

"Bricks?"

"Yes, sir, just bricks."

"May I open one?"

"Sure, why not!"

He broke the string and unwrapped about two pages of newspapers from it. He turned the brick over and over in his hand, and looked at it for several minutes. "A brick," he said.

"That's right. Just a brick."

"And you say there are bricks in the other packages."

"Yes, just plain old red bricks."

"Let's open another," he said.

"Be my guest." I could hear the others giggling in the car. The officer unwrapped another package and stood hefting one brick, then the other.

"And they're nothing but bricks, you say?"

"Yes, just a bunch of old, every-day, beat-up bricks!"

"Well, tell me, why do you have them wrapped up?"

I told him why. He grinned and said that his dad had told him he used to do that when he was courting his mother. He shut the trunk lid, and handed me the keys.

"Now, get the heck out of here," he said, "before I arrest you for smuggling diamonds across the border."

Zack and I worked late many nights and stayed ahead of our deadlines, so we could take off a few days for golf or other recreation.

It was a cold winter night when I got home about one o'clock. I was brain weary, more so than muscle-tired. Pushing a pen and pencil doesn't strain your biceps very much.

Anyway, I hit the sack as soon as I got home. We lived on the fifth floor of an apartment house, and next door to us lived a liquor salesman and his good wife. The salesman wasn't at home this night. I was just dozing off when the house phone buzzer went off in her apartment.

The walls were paper thin, and we could hear the good wife talking to someone down in the lobby. "Of course, you can't come up here," she said. "I don't know you!" And she hung up.

In a second, the buzzer sounded again. She sounded mad when she told him in no uncertain terms that he wasn't welcome in her apartment. Then we could hear the buzzer up and down the hall — and ours buzzed a couple of times. I told Mary if ours buzzed one more time that I was going down to the lobby and see who it was. I had just got the words past my tonsils when that musical rattlesnake jarred my eardrums again. "That rips it!" I said. I got up and slipped my trousers over my pajamas and put on a jacket. When I reached the lobby, it was empty. I walked over to the glass doors and saw two men arguing out in the street. They saw me, and one of 'em came toward me. He pushed through the doors and shouted, "All right, you son-of-a-bitch, whadda ya want?"

"I wanted to see who was ringing my bell," I answered. He was right against me now — pushing me with his body. I pushed away backward with my hands on his hips and felt a pistol beneath his overcoat. Then I started crowding him. I didn't want to get far enough away to let him pull his gun. We pushed back and forth. If anyone had seen us, they would have thought we were trying to work out a waltz routine.

He was cussing me all the time, but all I was trying to do was stay close to him. We pushed through the doors out to the street. Finally, I saw an opening. I gave him my very best Sunday punch. I hit him with all my strength, but didn't faze him. Then we started grappling in earnest. I thought to myself — what in the name of common sense am I doing wrestling with a gangster in the middle of the street in the dead of night!

He gave me another opening. I swung a right, and this time I dumped him on his head. I put my knee in the middle of his back, pulled up his overcoat and took the pistol from his holster. The fellow who was arguing with my gangster had run off about a half a block. When he saw that I was in control, he came running back. "Throw that pistol in those bushes," he advised. "It's against the law to have a gun!"

"It isn't my gun — besides, I need it!" I pointed it at the guy still lying in the street. "Get up, you bastard, and march to the apartment house."

He got up — bleeding all over the street and his nice overcoat. His face had hit the cement and put a neat gash in his forehead. We marched to the lobby, and I said, "Sit in that chair! I'm going to call the police."

"Call the police," he almost shouted. "That's who I want you to call. Call the police."

He flopped in the chair, and his overcoat swung open — and there, on his belt, hung a pair of handcuffs. “Holy Moses,” I thought, I’ve captured myself a New York City cop!

There were two black men who drove the apartment buses to the railroad station. I buzzed their quarters and asked that one of them come to the lobby. He came quickly, and I asked if he knew my prisoner.

“Yes, sir,” he answered. “That’s Officer O’Toole. He’s a Great Neck cop. When he gets to drinking, he calls on a nurse who lives on the floor below you.”

We were far enough from the cop so that he couldn’t hear. Besides, he was pretty busy trying to stop his head from bleeding. I took the bullets out of his 38 and gave it to the porter. “When I get in the elevator, give him his gun — but don’t tell him you know me.”

I put the bullets in my pocket and went upstairs. I told Mary, “If I ever again want to get involved in any trouble — hit me on the head with a hammer!”



Some days later, I told of my adventure at a party. Don Oatley said, "I know your dancing partner. He told me that a truck hit him. He's really a swell guy, and I want you to meet him."

Don telephoned me the next day. He had arranged a meet at the Colony House bar. We all three showed up. Don said, "Both of you guys are my good friends, so you should be good friends, too. Now cut out this kid stuff, and let's have a drink."

O'Toole told me he was glad that I didn't call the police. He was already in bad with the brass. "That would have just about cooked my goose," he said. He also told me that he and several other officers had watched the apartment and the train bus for several mornings. If they had found me, they planned to take me out to the country and pistol-whip me until I was a bird brain!

That was the first time I thanked God for having to work late, getting up late, and not having to catch a train!

Officer O'Toole and I exchanged Christmas cards for many years. The last card I received from him, he had written across the bottom: "Incidentally, just for the record, why didn't you keep your nose out of other people's business? Regards — Pat."

I heard that he died on D-Day in Normandy.



Earning our ham and eggs.

12

During my grammar school days, I felt more like a yo-yo than a student. Oklahoma and Kansas had twelve grades in their schools, while Texas had only eleven. We were flitting back and forth across the state borders like a mixed-up cockroach. When I was in the fifth grade in Oklahoma and moved back to Texas, they'd put me back to the fourth. By the same token, if I was in the third grade in Texas, I'd jump to the fourth in Oklahoma or Kansas. If someone asked me right quick what grade I was in, I would no more know than a jackrabbit. Consequently, as I think back now, it's almost impossible for me to know just what grade I was in — in what town — or for that matter, what town we moved to next. I remember what happened in each town, but its point in time eludes me.

Cushing, Oklahoma was a town that I breezed through, but it has some very strong vibes for me. My Dad's cafe was named the Cushing Dining Room, and was one of the very few that wasn't named Rogers' Cafe. Much later, Dad once counted up and he had owned 52 cafes, one boarding house, one hotel, one theatre, and two hamburger joints. Good Heavens! If the old man had owned all of them at once, maybe I'd now be operating the Rogers' McDonalds all over the world!

The Cushing Dining Room had a big horseshoe counter — no tables. It was just a fast hash joint. The chef's special was spaghetti-red — a big dish of spaghetti with a big dipper of chili poured in the middle of it. If you've never eaten real Mexican chili with hot peppers, you really have missed the adventure of a lifetime.

They say when a person had to go to the bathroom out on the prairie some place, it's really a sight to behold. The person would squat down, and when he let one go he'd jump fourteen or fifteen feet — according to the strength of his legs. When he finished, he might be a half mile from where he started. It smarts, brothers and sisters, it smarts!!

About three doors away from Dad's cafe was a movie. I got my first paying job there. Dad had given me a nickel or dime for some stupid picture I drew of a cowboy shooting hell out of an Indian —

but I'd never had a real job before. The popcorn man hired me to carry a box of popcorn up and down the aisles calling, "Get your fresh buttered popcorn — five cents, a nickel, one-twentieth of a dollar. Get it while it's hot!"

My salary was 75c per week, all the popcorn I could eat, and I got to see the movie free. I didn't bother anybody too much by calling out my wares, because half the people were reading the subtitles aloud, anyhow. A movie crowd in those days sounded like a prayer meeting on Wednesday night.

Along about then, I met the most beautiful girl in the whole, wide world — Tibby Goldberg. She was the roundest, softest thing that ever sat on the front row of a movie. I used to let her take a little pinch of popcorn off the top of each sack. She let me pinch her real easy, and she sure was sweet pinching. I sure planned to marry up with her just as soon as Mother would let me.

There was a candy store and ice cream parlor in Cushing, and that's where most of my wages went. Tibby could suck a soda through a straw faster and neater than anybody I ever saw — without belching. She really was a queen — and she patted me on the cheek every day and told me how nice I was. If I had been making a dollar a week, she could have had every dime of it.

Valentine's Day was coming up, and there was the biggest, most beautiful valentine in the candy store window that you could imagine. It was in full, glorious color with gold lace all around it, and a verse that said something like "for my sweetheart, valentine lady." Old Tibb just happened to mention several times that she sure wished some nice boy would send her that valentine. I knew right off who that nice boy was — but that valentine cost more than my salary would stand.

I begged Mother, and she came through as always. I bought that beautiful creation, and the clerk put it in a nice box with a big red heart on top. I couldn't wait for Valentine's Day to come, so I delivered it to Tibby's home right then. She met me at the door and said, "Oh, for me! How nice! Thank you so much!" That's the last time she ever spoke to me.

I saw her the next day having a banana split with the banker's son. She just ate the cherry off the middle scoop of ice cream and looked right through me. That's when I swore off women! They were just a bunch of gold-digging, conniving bitches, and not worth the gunpowder to blow their two-faced heads off!

I was brokenhearted — but a swim's a swim. Two kids and I walked about two miles to a little cow pond where we'd been swimming several times. While we were about a quarter of a mile

away, we started peeling off our clothes, because the last one in was a big, fat donkey.

Just after I'd pulled off my pants, I stepped on a big, fat snake. I can still feel the way he squirmed under my bare foot. I went into orbit, and needless to say, I was the first in the water. I won going away!

We were having a high old time — splashing each other and seeing how long we could stay under — when two cowboys rode up. One of them yelled, "Catch those boys; we'll teach them not to muddy up our cow tank!"

We started running through the weeds, strip-assed naked — our clothes were still on the bank. I saw a barbed-wire fence coming up. I knew I had to get through that fence, but I sure dreaded to think what might happen with all those sharp barbs. I was saved from having to make the decision whether to jump it or roll under it, because the cowboy threw his lasso over my head and led me back to the pond. The other two kids were sitting there with a rope around them.

"What'll we do with 'em?" asked one cowboy. "I think they're the same kids that's been keeping the water muddied up. I say CUT THEIR NUTS OUT!"

Oh, brother! I thought — not that! Cut out my tongue, cut off my ears — anything but that. I was sure that it'd hurt like everything. On the other hand, I'll bet Old Tibb would be sorry when she heard of it. It would teach her a good lesson.

I don't seem to remember much else about Cushing, other than the thousands of "tankies." They were building big steel oil tanks to store all the oil. The tank builders were all big, young, strong men. They slung a sledgehammer all day, and when they came to town in the evening, they slung each other. They'd eat spaghetti-red, then get drunk and fight. The streets would be full of them, with a dozen fights going on in every block.

It kept me busy running up and down the street trying to see all of them. I guess those big men just had to let off steam or they'd pop.

We went back to Ragtown. All the same kids were still there. Opal Isim was there — boy, was she ever there! She was more soft and more round than before — and much, much more beautiful. She'd make a guy forget Tibby in one shake of a sheep's tail.

Ragtown burned even before Dad could get his cafe ready. The

town was built back, and burned down again within a month. This was getting costly — and you couldn't get insurance.

I saw four men killed in Ragtown, and I saw the mess a "45" can make out of a guy. I was standing in front of Dad's cafe, picking my teeth, when a fellow came out of the cafe and unloaded his pistol into a man sitting in a car. I followed as they carried him across the street to a doctor's office. The front of his shirt had six neat holes in it, but you should have seen the back where the bullets had come out. His shirt looked like it had been caught in a coffee grinder.

One night we were wakened by gunfire and thought that the town was on fire again. Mother, Dad and I looked out our upstairs window. Two guys were dodging around a parked Cadillac, blasting away at each other. They both raised up and fired at almost the same instant. They didn't pitch forward like they do in the movies. They landed on their backs — about two yards backward. We all "ohed" and "ahed" around the Cadillac the next morning. It looked like Swiss cheese with all those bullet holes.

A little carnival came to town, and I made a date to take Opal. I was going barefoot, and thought I should wear some shoes — going out with such a beautiful girl. I got 75c from Mother and bought myself a new pair of tennis shoes.

I was ashamed of my big feet, so I got them about two sizes too small. I dolled up in my newest black satin shirt and my new tennies, and took my beautiful Opal out on the town. We got to the carnival at just about dark. We walked, walked, walked — rode, rode, rode — threw, threw, threw, and did just about everything you can do at a carnival. And all this time, my poor feet were killing me! My toes were rolled up in those short shoes, and my feet felt like they were coming off any second.

I was never so happy to see a big black storm cloud in my life. I told Opal I'd better take her home before we got washed away. She said she sure didn't want to get her chiffon dress soaked — so off to her house we went. She walked — I limped.

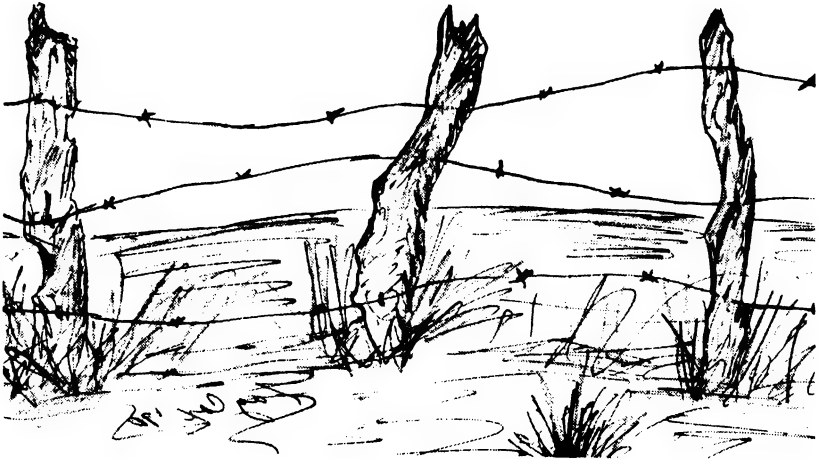
When Opal closed her door, I ripped off those damned shoes before I got off the porch — and I threw them as far as I could. Never again would I wear shoes too small. I'd just let my big feet stick out and be happy.

Dad had been to Oklahoma City, and he came home with a brand new Maxwell car. He never talked about it until many years later — I think he was ashamed. We hardly ever went out in it that we didn't have to be towed back.

Once, Mother, Dad and I were going to Ardmore — about 25 miles away. We had gotten maybe five miles out of town, and hit a little extra sand. We pulled the rear end out of Mr. Maxwell. Along came a wagon with an empty coffin on it, going to Ragtown. Dad asked the fellow if he could pull us in. The man said he'd love to, but his horses were on their last legs and he was afraid they couldn't make it. "But your missus and boy can ride if they want to," he added.

Dad stayed with the car, and Mother said she'd send someone to pull him back. The driver of the wagon said it would be less bumpy if we'd sit on the coffin rather than flat down on the wagon. We did, and it really wasn't bad. When we got to town and started up Main Street, I noticed all the men took off their hats and placed them over their hearts. I asked Mother why they were doing it. She said, "I guess they think our Maxwell did Dad in — and that we're bringing Daddy home!"

The next fire did do Dad in. He said he'd had it, so we packed off to El Paso.



13

El Paso was a new breed of cats. I'd never lived in a town just like it. Even then, though, they had a gang of alligators in the town plaza just as they still do today. Dad had an upstairs hotel called "El Rex." I saw that "Rex" in my dreams. I had a little front bedroom, and "Rex" flashed on and off all night long. I'd lie there at night and blink my eyes in time with it, but before the tune was finished I'd be fast asleep.

Most of my playmates were Mexican, and I learned "Si," and how to count up to fifteen in Spanish. I don't know what grade I was in, but it wasn't very high up the ladder. We took Spanish, and it was all Greek to me.

There was a big Mexican boy who sat behind me. His name was Jesus. We pronounced it Jesus — and not the way Mexicans say it. I let Jesus ride my bike, and he spelled the Spanish words for me.

The first day I was in school, several bigger boys caught me and dragged me, bump, bump, down the steps on my tail. A teacher marched all of us into the lady principal. She asked me what the boys had done to me. I told her that we were just playing cops and robbers, and they had captured me—and that it didn't hurt a bit. She excused us — and outside, the guys said I was okay — I hadn't squealed. I hadn't squealed because I was sure that one of 'em would bust my nose.

That afternoon, instead of recess, they marched us down to a big room in the basement. They put on a record, and we started tippy-toe, hop, hop, skip, skip around the room — and I was holding the hand of a girl I had never seen before. When she hopped, I tippy-toed — when she tippy-toed, I skipped. I was never so mortified in all my born days.

Then came the most horrible part. We stopped, faced each other, and were supposed to do "patty-cake!" I didn't know when to slap my hands and when to "patty" hers. I missed every time and felt like a clumsy dunce. I went home and told Mother that I was never going back to that stupid school again. I don't know what happened to my plans, but I missed on that, too. I went back to school the next day.

Then, big excitement! Pancho Villa attacked Juarez, the Mexican town across the Rio Grande. We all went to the roof of the hotel and watched the fight. We couldn't see much at night, but we could see the flash of the guns and hear the explosions. Villa didn't hold Juarez very long. He got word that a big Mexican Army was on its way, so he and his army split during the night. He did stay long enough to print his own money. After he was gone off into the hills, you could buy a thousand dollars for fifty cents! I had a roll that would choke a horse.

Not long after that, Pancho Villa came across the border and sacked Columbus, New Mexico. There were American soldiers camped north of town, but by the time they got out of their sacks, found their socks and got to town, it was too late. Villa and his party had already burned the town, shot what they wanted to, and burned the rest. That was when General John J. Pershing took soldiers into Mexico, trying to catch Pancho Villa and his merry men. I heard he really didn't care if he caught up with Villa or not, but he thought we were going to get into war with Germany, and just wanted to season his men.

Dad figured Columbus might be good for a cafe, so we loaded into our Reo auto and drove to New Mexico. We got there before they had removed the dead horses or hauled away the ashes. After looking at what was left of the town, Dad decided against it. So we drove back to El Paso.

When General Pershing brought his men out of Mexico, he came to El Paso, and there was a big parade. Old "Black Jack" looked every inch a real hero. He rode tall in the saddle, and saluted everyone along the march.

The worst part about El Paso was hearing the Army Band playing the mournful dirge as they took some dead soldier to the depot. The flu was killing them almost faster than they could get them to the trains. They always had a horse, walking behind the coffin — no rider, but just a pair of boots turned backwards in the stirrups. It was a very sad sight and sound.

When we entered the war, Dad put in a cafe at Pitcher, Oklahoma, a lead and zinc mining town. It was on a real boom because the army needed all the lead it could get. I joined the Boy Scouts and bought a snare drum so I could beat time on our marches. I soon learned that was one of the stupidest things I ever thought up. All the other scouts toddled along with nothing more to do than pick their noses — while I had to carry that damn drum and rat-a-tat-tat!



I won three medals during WW I, two for selling war bonds and the third from the scoutmaster playing poker.

I did win two medals, however. If a scout got ten people to sign a promise to buy a war bond, he won a medal. So I came out of World War I with three medals. I won the third medal from the Scoutmaster at poker. The idiot tried to fill an inside straight against my pair of deuces!

Next we moved to Enid, Oklahoma, where my big adventure was sleeping with the harvest hands. Enid was built around a big courthouse square, two blocks long and one block wide, with lots of trees and grass. During the late spring, the wheat harvest boys would come to Enid to hire on with a harvest crew. Hundreds would bed down on the courthouse grass, and us kids thought it was great fun to sleep out with them. Man! We heard dirty stories out there that would curl your eyebrows.

Then there was Garber! My best recollection of that place was my NOT catching scarlet fever! One night I spent the night with a chum at his house. He complained of being sick, and had a high fever. The next morning the doctor came and said the terrifying words . . . "Scarlet Fever!" He gave me a shot and told me to beat it. I didn't see my friend for the longest time, but when he finally did come out, I was shocked. He looked like a bean pole, and was as bald-headed as a billiard ball.

Now comes Ranger, Texas. The war is over, and everything is again right with the world. We have won the war to stop all wars.

Ranger was a small place of perhaps a thousand people. An oil well blew in on Mr. McCluskey's farm. The story was that Mrs. McCluskey was madder than an old wet hen because when the well blew in, it got old nasty black oil all over her nice white chickens. After that she soon had a flock of new black Cadillacs — one for each direction!

Ranger grew from a thousand sleepy people to over thirty thousand almost overnight. Dad broke all records getting back to Texas. He bought a big boarding house right in the center of the main block.

The dining room had twelve long tables that seated about a dozen people each. Everything was served family style — in other words, you pitched 'til you won! The doors were kept closed until meal time. When they were flung open, you had to stand back — it was like a mad stampede. It was summertime, and Dad had the waiters put big pitchers of iced tea and lemonade on the tables before they brought the food. Dad said when those hot oil field workers sat down, they'd fill up on cold drinks, and then couldn't eat so much grub.

The town didn't have enough water supply to give everyone enough to drink — let alone bathe. Dad bought a tank wagon and hauled his water from a farmer's well. He kept a big tin tank filled out back of the kitchen. Next door was a vacant lot, so a man rented it and hung up a bunch of Lister bags — then strung a big banner from Dad's building to the building on the other side of the lot. It read, in big red letters, "ICE COLD OZARK MOUNTAIN SPRING WATER — ALL YOU CAN DRINK FOR 10c" He did a land office business, and what the people didn't know didn't hurt them — he bought his water from Dad.

It rained a lot in Ranger. It always did around any oil field. I suppose all the loose gas and nitroglycerine they used in the wells brought it on. The streets were knee-deep in mud. So many wagons of pipe went over them that they were almost like quicksand. Everyone wore rubber boots, but most times the boots would stick in the mud, and you'd walk out of them. Men built big sleds that would hold about ten standing people. They were pulled by a couple of mules, and it only cost 10c to ride across the street.

Just across the street from Dad's cafe was a pay toilet. It was a long, narrow shed type building with fifteen holes cut in the wooden seat — all side by side — no partitions. It also cost a dime, and on Saturday nights, a quarter. I paid my dime one day and went in to

take my seat. Some man had dropped two twenty dollar bills in front of my location. Boy! I was through before I started, and got out of there quick. I had never been so rich.

School was a blast. I think I was in the sixth grade — or was it the seventh? They had so many kids they built shacks to hold the overflow. When winter came, we'd all put on a trembling knee act. We'd pretend we were cold. I put on a performance that I'll bet would have done good on Broadway. I'd shake all over and rattle my teeth. I know it was good because one day the teacher said, "I know Gordon's cold, because nobody could take on like that unless he was really freezing. So, class is dismissed! We'll try to get more heat tomorrow!"

Billy Sunday came to Ranger. He was the great Evangelist around 1919. They built him a platform on the open space next to the pay toilet — then put flags and bunting all over the big john. Reverend Sunday made mention of it in his sermon that night. "I declare," he preached. "That is undoubtedly the most beautiful outhouse in these whole United States, and in all probability, the most useful!" I could go along with that. It had already coughed up forty bucks for me.

Billy Sunday got in the groove with his preaching. He grabbed a chair and beat hell out of the stage. "If I had that old devil, I'd whack his ugly head," shouted the Reverend. The crowd whooped and yelled, "Give it to him, Bill; pour it on him!" I'm sure half of them were drunk.

About this time, we got a man teacher. He had been a lieutenant in the Army, and was still wearing his uniform, wrap leggings and all. He was also our coach. We had a shirt-tail football team. We never played anyone, but we ran signals every day. I bought me a helmet and a pair of football britches, suitable for a quarterback.

One day, three of us did something that made a teacher pretty mad. I don't remember what we did, but it was bad enough to rate a whipping. She took us in a room and said, "Would you rather I gave the licking or would you rather have Mr. Spalding do it?" He was the new man teacher. We knew she couldn't hit as hard as he could, so we all chose her. "Then I'll just let Mr. Spalding do it!" she said as she pranced out of the room. That was just like a woman! You couldn't trust one.

Soon Mr. Spalding came in. He closed the door, came over and sat on the edge of the desk. "Fellows, I don't know what you've done, so if Miss Blueberry wants you punished, she should have done it herself. Now when I slap this desk, one of you yell like I'm ripping you apart!" He whammed the desk, and one of us would let it out. If

Miss Blueberry was listening, I'll bet she was sorry she had turned that brute loose on us. That was the last spanking I ever got from anyone, and I might say, the most pleasant. That guy could do no wrong, and we told every boy in school about it. If I ever became a soldier, I hoped I'd be just like him.

About this time, I met Olga. My good pal, James Shepard, and I were invited to a party. I was the proud owner of four, count 'em, four — silk shirts. They cost fifteen smackers each.

James didn't have a silk shirt, so I loaned him a beautiful pink creation, and I wore a red, green and blue striped one.

The first party game was called "Wink'em." The chairs were placed in a circle. The girls sat in the chairs, and the boys stood behind. One chair was vacant. The vacant chair boy would wink at some girl. She would try to get away and go to his chair, but if she got caught before she escaped, she had to pay a fine — one tight lip kiss. It was a very unfair game. If the girl had warts on her nose, you let her get away. If you really wanted to smack one, you could catch her easily. After five or six good kisses, you'd let her escape, so you could get another good kisser. Playing the field was always better.

After a while, the boys changed places with the girls. Right off, some dame gives James a big wink. The damn fool tried to get away. His gal grabbed the back of "my" shirt and ripped it from the collar clear to his tailbone. I almost fainted. James didn't give a damn, though. Every time a girl winked at him, he'd buck and jerk until they tore the shirt clear off - right down to his B.V.D.'s. After it was first ripped, they could have burned it for all I cared — and him, too.

Next, someone suggested that we play "Post Office." That suited me. I was sweet on a girl by the name of Hortense, and I had a great desire to get her in a dark room. I'd "post office" her, and you could bet your sweet life on that.

I never got to Hortense. A little gal named Olga called my name. The announcer said I had two special deliveries and a package waiting for me. Now, Olga was a pretty nice package herself. She had long, golden curls and a peaches and cream complexion. Her lips were full and round. She was plenty round in other places, too, and as soft as an over-ripe cantaloupe.

I went into the room, and it was blacker than the ace of spades. I felt around, but I couldn't find little Olga. "I'm over here at General Delivery," she softly whispered.

"Well, I want my mail," I bravely said, as I leaned over to give her a little kiss.

When our lips met, something new happened. Olga gave a suction, and my tongue flew out of my mouth and damned near went

down her throat. I never before had anything so thrilling. I think all my toenails popped off. My knees buckled, and I almost fell on my prat.

You can bet I got that other special delivery, and I read it right there in the dark. I never got the packages. If I had, I'm sure that I wouldn't be alive today.

While I was still in the "post office," I decided that I'd have to ask Mother in the morning if it wasn't time for me to get married!

I don't know what happened to Hortense, but Olga and I made music together until Olga moved away. Life was a dry well — never again would there be sunshine — no bird would sing — Olga was gone!

I made up my mind that there never could be another girl — then I saw Dorothy. Dot had everything that Olga had, and could give her change for a twenty. Dot was so much more soft, so much more round than any of the others. I couldn't understand at first why they kept getting better and better.

Then the light dawned. It was because we were all getting older. Man alive! What fun old people must have!

Hogtown was about sixteen miles south. My Uncle Charley had a restaurant there, and my good Ragtown friend, Jake McCarthy, now lived there. So I visited quite often.

They drilled up the whole town — then got permission to move all the bodies from the graveyard to another location. Within weeks, they were drilling all over the old graveyard.

Oil booms lasted longer than they do now. It took them longer to drill a well. The bit pounded up and down to make the hole. Now, the rotary bits bore a hole through rock faster than a hot knife goes through butter.

One night, a Greek cafe owner hit an oil worker with a pistol butt and put his eye out. The word spread fast — "some foreigner has hit one of our people and blinded him." The mob formed and wrecked every business in town that was owned by anyone who didn't have an Anglo name. They wrecked all the fixtures and looted all the merchandise. Then ran the owners out of town.

The next day, I caught a ride on a wagon hauling oil well casing. I wanted to see what the town looked like, and see how my friend made out.

Jake told me that it just made him sick to see all those fifteen dollar silk shirts carried out of those stores. I asked him if he got anything. "Only a couple of jazzbow ties," he said. "A guy gave

them to me — said he wouldn't he caught dead wearing the sissy things." They were little bow ties about as big as a postage stamp with an elastic band to hold them around your neck. He gave me one, so I came away with part of the loot.

Mother and Dad had gone to Ft. Worth on a shopping spree. I had remained in Ranger because school was still in session.

The fire started in the Rippy Cafe just around the corner from Dad's place. Our home was on another street about two blocks away.

The fire spread fast — you might say like "wild fire." Most of the buildings were made of pine, so they burned like a forest. I ran around to our boarding house, but the crew there had decided there wasn't anything they could move that was worth saving. So they just let her burn. The fire skipped around the corner, and on down the block past our business — then jumped the street and was burning on both sides. They dynamited houses ahead of the blaze, trying to make a firebreak, but it just busted them up and made good kindling. There was no water system, so the blaze just ran wild.

Now the fire had jumped another street and was coming toward our house. I saw people carrying stuff out of places and putting it in the street — then they went back for more, and as they did, thieves carried off what they had just saved! They were working for nothing.

I ran to our home, and across the street was a two-story office supply. Some man was saving typewriters. He was throwing them out of an upstairs window! When they hit the street, they burst like bombs, but the nitwit kept throwing them.

I went into our house, spread out some bed sheets, then started dumping the dresser drawer contents in them. I also got all of our clothes, and put them in bundles. I got everything I thought I could carry away.

I saw some school friends, so got them to watch the things I had stacked outside. I went in the house and got all of the kerosene lamps and placed them in a bunch on the living room floor. When the fire got to our house, I wanted to give it a funeral with a bang!

The kids helped me carry my bundles to one of their homes — then we went back to see my house burn down in style. All of the windows blew out — it was neat!

Dad and Mother came back as soon as they heard the news. They thought I had done a good job — and my stock went up with Dorothy. All in all, it was a grand fire!

Dad rebuilt a brick building and put in a first class cafe. He worried for days about what would happen if he raised ham and eggs to 75c.

The new cafe was built where the pay toilet used to be, and business was very brisk. Dad soon had a hundred thousand in the bank.

The bank put in a branch in a small place between Ranger and Breckenridge, and it was managed by a man named Barney Noble. Dad had known him for a long time, so to help Barney's bank get started, he transferred his account.

A few nights later, Ned Malone, another friend of Dad's, came into the cafe. Malone had several casing crews and had just been paid thirty thousand dollars for work his crew had done on some oil wells. The bank was closed, and he was worried to be carrying so much cash around. Dad told him to go to the side door of the bank. They often worked late and would take his deposit.

Malone rode the sled across the street, knocked on the bank door, and was let in by the bank's president.

"I'm always pleased to do a favor for any friend of Mr. Rogers," he said. He wrote out a deposit slip for Ned and told him his money was in safe hands.

The bank didn't open the next morning, and the bank president was on his way to Mexico, or somewhere.

Dad jumped in his car and didn't touch the ground until he reached Barney's bank. Barney hadn't heard the news yet, so Dad withdrew his money — all in cash. While Barney was talking to Dad, the phone rang. It was the bank examiner telling Barney to lock the doors.

No one else ever got a dime out of either bank. Malone said, "I hope the bastard drinks the water in Mexico!"

Ranger was playing DeLeon a game of football. DeLeon was advertised as "The Peanut Capital of the World," but their boys weren't peanuts. They looked as big as a barn to me. Ranger didn't have many boys on the team, so the coach told our grammar school team to suit out and sit on the Ranger bench to make it look better to the spectators. I was proud as potato soup to even be near our players — only when Ranger was on the field, there were just three subs left on the bench.

I don't know who was winning. I was too busy watching people — hoping they'd look at me all togged out in football clothes — me, a

high school football player. They couldn't possibly know I was still in grammar school.

The game rocked along until the fourth quarter. All of the subs had been in. If you were taken out in 1919, you couldn't be sent back until the next half — so all our players had been used up.

Then, lightning struck the honey factory. Our left tackle, a big 200 pounder, had to make a run for the barn. The guy had diarrhea! There were no subs — the coach was desperate. He came over and sat down by me. "Rogers, how would you like to go in and play some real football?"

I figured the poor guy had lost his marbles. "Why, sure, coach," I said. I thought I'd go along with the gag.

"Then get in there, Tiger — give 'em hell!" He slapped me on the back and shoved me onto the field.

I ran to the ump and reported, "I'm Rogers for left tackle." The ump looked at me and said, "You must be kidding!"

Our left guard said, "I'll move over to tackle, Rogers, you play guard."

Boy, oh boy, oh boy! I was actually in a football game. I'll bet I was the only Ranger grammar school kid to ever play with the varsity.

DeLeon had the ball. They took pity and didn't run any plays over me. I'd squirt through the opposing guard's legs, or go around. As I think back on it now, I know he didn't try to stop me. The backs didn't bother me. They wouldn't block. They'd just brush against me and knock me for a loop.

Only once did I stop a play. A guy brushed me the wrong way. I fell down, and the runner fell over me.

They didn't hurt me — but I beat myself up pretty good diving against them. The game ended, and I was the big hero to the other members of the grammar school "Booger Bears."

The next morning I was at the newspaper office before the paper came out — and I got just about the first paper off the press.



There it was — right on the back page — “A substitute was sent in who wouldn’t weigh a hundred pounds if his britches were full of bricks.”

That’s all it said. The reporter didn’t even mention my name.

14

Breckenridge was the next port of call. It was wild and wooly and full of fleas, just like the other boom towns had been — plenty of whores, plenty of gamblers, and plenty of hard-working men to feed the kitty.

Dad had a big business the day he opened. Most of the customers had been eating with him for years — through the other boom towns. He also knew most of the merchants — the Saieds, Sam the Tailor, all the people who followed the oil fields.

There was Fern Campbell, a real beautiful girl whom I met the first day in school. Fern didn’t last long. Another guy cut in, and I was out. It was really no heart break, because Dorothy moved over from Ranger. We took up right where we had left off when I moved away.

The dope scene wasn’t so heavy then that it caused any great splash, but I saw enough of what it did to people, and I wouldn’t touch it with a forty foot needle. If the kids now could see some of the junkies I saw, they’d stand away back before they’d jump off the deep end. You sure can’t win.

One day I was going to town, and I had to pass a little one-room jail they had built mostly for drunks. A cook who had worked for Dad saw me and called me to the window.

“Rogers, I have an awful headache. Would you get me a box of aspirin?”

“Sure thing!” And I went to the nearest drug store and bought a box. I carried them back and passed them through the bars. His hands were shaking so badly he could hardly open the little tin. When he did, he poured the whole dozen aspirin into his hand, and down the hatch with one gulp!

The guy didn’t have a headache. He needed a fix, and that was the closest thing he could get to one.

Crystal Falls was a five-house town a few miles north of Breckenridge. There was a little dam across the river, and it made a wonderful swimming hole. The water spilled over the dam’s top. If you swam too close to it, and got your feet off the bottom, you were

over the dam before you could wink an eye. It was only about a fifteen foot drop, and no one ever got hurt that I know of. Below the dam was a hard, smooth, rock bottom where you could drive your car out and give it a wash.

Dad was driving a Cadillac then. The best way for me to get it was to promise to wash it. One day I got Dorothy, a preacher's daughter and her boy friend, and we took off for Crystal Falls. We played a game that I suppose most Texas kids played. If you crossed a cattle guard, you got a kiss; if you saw a wagon of hay, you got a kiss; if a white horse was pulling the wagon, you got a kiss; if anyone in the car breathed, you got a kiss! It was a crackerjack game!

We pulled down into the river below the falls, took off our shoes and socks, and rolled up our pants legs. The girls tucked up their dresses a little and removed their shoes and stockings. You could see maybe six inches above their knees. That wasn't quite like seeing that naked whore come sailing out the window in Ragtown — but it was a thrill a minute.

The girls were doing most of the car bathing, because Lloyd and I were too busy peeping at the girls' thighs. It was a toss-up who had the prettiest, but I was kinda leaning towards the preacher's daughter because I thought hers were slightly larger than Dorothy's — and they looked a whale of a lot softer.

The car was washed and dried, so we started back home — but then we saw a nice pasture and turned off the road to rest awhile. I wasn't really tired — I was just tired of holding that wheel and not being able to use both hands.

Old Lloyd and his babe were wheeling and dealing in the back seat, and I was trying to teach Dot to kiss like Olga, but without too much luck. A deep voice almost startled me out of my B.V.D.'s!

"Sorry to bust up a wrestling match like this, but have you seen a couple of stray horses?"

I straightened up at once and was trying to get my mouth unpuckered so I could speak. It was a man on a big black mule, and the mule's head was sticking in the car on Dot's side.

"No, we haven't," I said. "We sure haven't."

I don't think the rider was exactly satisfied with my answer, because he could see we weren't watching for any horses — so he jerked the mule's head hard and spun him around by sheer force. The mule's tail swished in the car as he whirled, and he let loose the loudest B-Rack — F-A-R-R-T I have ever heard. He blew oats and specks of "used to be food" all over the four of us.

I didn't know what to do or say. I was biting my lip to keep from laughing, but I wasn't biting too much because I wasn't sure what the

hell might be sticking on it! My face must have been as red as a beet, because I was about to burst — but too polite to be rude.

Dorothy looked at me, and she couldn't hold it any longer. She laughed — then we all laughed 'til we were crying like babies.

Finally, I got control of myself enough to clear my eyes so that I could see, and drove back to the river. We got out and washed our faces — and cleaned our clothes the best we could.

We made the trip back home without further ado. When Dad saw the front of my shirt, he laughed and said, "Where were you when the stuff hit the fan?"

The newspapers were starting to tell about the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan. It still wasn't much out of the deep south, but it had the interest of Jack Williams and myself. We thought it might be exciting to fictitiously organize the Klan in Breckenridge.

Jack's folks owned a typewriter, and I composed the letter. Jack addressed it to the Breckenridge newspaper, and then —

"Dear Sirs:

We want to inform the citizens of Breckenridge that the K.K.K. has formed a chapter and have over two hundred tried and true charter members. We know that more of you will join our cause — you will be contacted soon by a member. We hereby warn all gamblers, pimps, and whores to tread easy. You will feel our wrath soon.

Signed,
R.W.O.T."

We gave some very deep thought to the signature. We decided that "R" was for Rogers and the "W" for Williams. Thinking that more letters might make it look more official, we added "O" for my birth state, Oklahoma, and "T" for Jack's home state of Tennessee.

We mailed the letter at noon, and by two o'clock they had an extra on the street. What a thrill — my first words to ever appear in print. They had a big headline clear across the paper: "KKK COMES TO TOWN!" Then they printed our letter, word for word. The initials meant, according to the paper, "Royal Wizard of Texas."

Boy! We really hit the jackpot. So we wrote another letter. This time we really told them to straighten up or suffer the lash.

We went to the newspaper office and asked the fellow if they needed any more boys to sell papers. He said they might if they put out any more extras.

We dropped the letter in the office, walked outside, and sat on the curb. In about fifteen minutes, he came to the door. "Hey, you guys! Stand by. We're coming out with another extra just as soon as we can roll the press." It was our story.

We sold papers like hotcakes. Most men handed us a dime or quarter and said, "Keep the change." We each made about ten dollars.

We decided to cool it before we got caught. We weren't too sure that we couldn't be sent to the pen for forgery. This is the first time I've ever mentioned it.

"Here we go again!" said Dad. A fire had broken out across the street from our cafe. We started gathering up all the things we could carry. My Uncle Charley, who had a domino hall next to the cafe, came dashing in and yelled, "Someone get on the roof. I'll spot any flare-ups on our side, and you can beat it out."

I got an arm full of wet tablecloths and climbed up from the back. Uncle Charley had given the same instructions to every business on our side — so there was somebody on top of every building.

There were several two-story places across the street, and the flames looked like they were shooting a hundred feet into the air. A shower of sparks was falling everywhere. Uncle Charley held a wet blanket between himself and the roaring fire — and I mean roaring! Anyone who hasn't seen a town of all pine board buildings burn hasn't seen a real fire. It's a roaring blast furnace.

Uncle Charley was running up and down the street like a mad man — "There," he'd shout. "There's a blaze on the awning of Ned's Grocery." And someone would smother it out.

"To your right, Gordon. It's smoking — get it, get it!"

I'd smack it with my wet cloth. He ran and yelled for twenty minutes. My admiration for Uncle Charley climbed one thousand percent while I watched him work. He was a fat man. How he had the energy to keep running beat the hell outta me.

The fire finally ran its course. We saved our side — only one block burned on the other. It was nothing like Ranger, where four square blocks went, or the several times that the entire town of Ragtown burned to cinders.

I saw only one more big fire. That was at Hobbs, New Mexico. I've had it up to here with fires.

Near the heart of Texas is the little city of Mexia. Very few outsiders ever learned to pronounce it, and some people who've lived there couldn't pronounce it. It was a great boom while it lasted — so what you called it didn't matter. Right near is a very small town named Tehuacana. Try and pronounce that when you have a mouth full of mush. When Texas was trying to select a capital, Austin and Tehuacana were in the race.

Austin won by just a few votes. If Tehuacana had won, very few Texans would have ever learned to say it, and nobody but the Tehuacana postmaster would have been able to spell it.

There's a cute story about Mexia. A gentleman was driving through the country, and he saw a big sign — "You are entering the city of Mexia."

"Holy Moses," he asked himself. "How do you pronounce that name? Is it Moe-hair, or Mex-eye-a, or Mex-ah-a?" He gave up and drove on into town. He saw a Dairy Queen, so parked and went inside. He ordered a milkshake, and then asked the waitress, "Do me a favor. What's the name of this place? I wish you would pronounce it very slowly so I can get every syllable."

"This place is easy to pronounce," said the girl. "It's Day-ree Que-e-n!"

Dad didn't go into business there, so we lived there only about three months. I really didn't get too involved.

A few of us would pool our money and rent a Model T and drive the thirteen miles to Teague. We had some neat girls staked out over there — so we'd do some heavy courting.

One night a bunch of boys were returning from Teague, and their headlights failed. It was a moonless night — very dark — so a boy lay on top of each front fender to help the driver guide. They would yell, "a little to the right," or "a little to the left," and in that way kept to the middle of the road. It was a dirt road — no white lines.

They were going along at a pretty fast clip when suddenly they hit a buggy. The buggy shaft ran clear through one kid — from his chest right straight through and out his bottom! He never spoke a word — just groaned once, and that was it!

The big attractions in Mexia were the gambling houses. They ran wide open, and they would let us kids in to gamble our two or three bucks away. We played craps mostly — bet fifty cents on even or odd, on the come line, or whatever. We nearly always lost, but it was great fun, or so we thought.

Everything was fine until one night when about ten Texas Rangers and two companies of National Guard soldiers came in like a tidal wave. They closed every gambling house in or out of town, arrested all the pro gamblers, pimps and red light gals they could latch onto. They shut the vice down in ten minutes. The town was under martial law for months.

Just a quickie about Crane, Texas. I never really lived there, but Dad had a cafe. I was going to art school in Chicago at the time, so only paid a visit.

I remember the crows mostly. Dad had a small two-room shack where he slept. While I was in town, I sacked there, also, and tried to catch up on my sleep. The people next door had four pet black crows. At daylight, those blasted birds would start their shrill cawing. I don't know how anything can scream constantly without ripping the lining out of its throat. They would get on our front porch and let it out.

I had always heard that if you slit a crow's tongue, he could talk like a parrot. I found out how that got started. I'd go to the door to scare 'em away. They wouldn't scare. They'd just throw their heads back and scream at me. I could see clear down their red throats — they haven't got a tongue!

My cousin, Paul, was taking cash nights at the cafe. One night he looked out and saw about a hundred men walking in the middle of the street toward the cafe. When they got in front of the cafe, someone called "HALT!" It was another cousin, Jack DeGraftenreid. He was a Texas Ranger, and had slipped into town and raided a gambling hall. He had arrested everyone in it.

He told Paul to guard them until he could locate the sheriff. Paul said, "Hold it, Jack, I can't hold these people here — I have no authority!"

"You have now," said Jack. "I hereby deputize you as a Texas Ranger." With that, he handed Paul a sawed-off shotgun, turned to the crowd and told them that if anyone tried to run away, this deputy would shoot his legs off. "So stay hitched."

15

From Mexia we went to Whizbang, a two-block shack town in northern Oklahoma. It's not on the map anymore — I checked. I don't know if it faded away, changed its name, or what.

I was the night cashier, and hopped counter if we got real busy. Again there was no law, so the town went its own wild way.

At night, around three o'clock, all the barrel houses (dance halls) and gambling houses would close. The counter would fill up with men who wanted a snack before they trundled off to bed. Everyone carried a pistol jammed under his belt, so they'd pull them out and place them beside their plates. I guess it wasn't too comfortable having a "45" pressing against your tummy while eating. If you looked down the counter, you would see thirty "45's" all rowed up. It looked more like a shooting gallery than a restaurant.

One day it snowed. A big snow bank was in front of the cafe — partly a drift, and partly where the snow had been shoveled from the board sidewalk.

About midnight, a big raw-boned man came in and shouted, "I can run faster, jump farther, dive deeper, and come up drier than any dirty son-of-a-bitch in Whizbang!"

He turned and ran through the door and did a swan dive into the snowbank. He hit a railroad tie head on. The tie had been placed there to stop an auto from coming up on the porch.

We pulled the poor guy out of the snow and dragged him inside. It took some time to bring him to. He'd almost cracked his skull. When his eyes finally quit spinning, he sat up and said, "I'm all the things I said I was, but I sure as hell don't have the hardest head in Whizbang."

Another night, I was sitting behind the cash register when I heard someone chopping. I went out front, and a drunk had an axe and was chopping away at our wooden awning post. I recognized him as one of our good customers. I only knew him as "Fats," so I said, "What's going on, Fats?"

• "I'm chopping this goddamned post down!"

“Look, Fats, if you chop the posts the awning will fall down in front of the cafe, and nobody can get in. Why don’t you chop some place else?”

“I don’t give a damn where I chop — I just wanna chop!”

He moved to a jewelry store next door. He chopped both posts, and the wooden awning fell down in front like the lid on a box. He backed off into the street, admired his work, then shouldered his axe and marched off.

I went home before the jeweler came to open up, but Dad told me the fellow got some new posts and fixed the awning back in thirty minutes.

Many funny things happened in Whizbank.

It was a rainy night, and the mud was churned up in the street. A young oil-field worker, drunk of course, came through the door riding a stick horse — which was a long two by four. He trotted back to the rear of the dining room, circled a potbellied stove, and trotted back and out through the door.

In less than a minute, he came back again, still on his horse, and trotting along. He circled the stove, and when he was almost to the front door, I stopped him.

“Just what are you doing?”

“I’m plowing,” he said.

“Well,” I answered, “make one more row and call it quits.”

“Fair enough.” And out the door he trotted.

He circled around in the street and came back through, making the one last row. He stopped, pretended to hitch his horse, and had a cup of coffee.

One night as I was sitting on my cash register stool and wondering where we’d go next, a bullet came through the outside wall and missed my head by about six inches. It ruined a mirror behind me. I fell on my face behind the counter, because I didn’t know if another shot was coming.

“Red” Staples, our night waiter, grabbed a gun from under the counter. (We had several placed along just in case of a stick-up.) Red ran out the kitchen door and came through a little alley-way between our building and the next one. There was a guy taking a drink, and he still had the “45” in his hand. Red asked why he’d fired.

“I just traded for this gun, an’ I wanted to see if it’d shoot.”

The next gunplay around the cafe wasn’t just for fun. Again it was a rainy night. There was a pool hall three doors away, and some man went gunning for another man. He saw the guy in the pool hall and went in with the pistol in his hand.

That started the stampede. Everyone ran out of the pool hall, circled in the muddy street, and came charging into the cafe. They all huddled near the potbellied stove.

Next came the guy with the pistol. He walked back toward the stove, and again the race was on. In their rush for the door, the guys from the pool hall, who had taken refuge around the potbellied stove, almost ran over him. They circled in the street again, and headed back for the pool hall — but the fellow the gunman was after didn't make it. He received two bullets before he reached the walk, and fell face down in the mud.

Dad sold out the place in Whizbang, and we went to Pioneer, Texas. That's where we lost Mother.

As you know, I then went to Childress to live with my grandparents while going to high school.

16

High school was more fun than a barrel of monkeys. I knew I was having the time of my life, and tried every way I could think of to help it along. I was the football quarterback for four years — a real hero for that point in time — and didn't have too much trouble getting dates with the beautiful chicks.

In all modesty, I can truthfully say I was one of the leaders in school.

When we played football, we not only had to fight to win the game, but we had to fight afterward to get out of town.

One time we went to Shamrock. In those days, you started the next play from where the ball was downed. If it was one yard from the sideline, that's where you lined up. When we were near the sideline and bent over to get set, some guy on the sideline would boot you in the seat. More fights took place off the field than on. Our rooters took up the cause, and sometimes both teams would stop and watch the fights off the field.

Shamrock didn't have dressing rooms then, so our team dressed in a large room in back of a barber shop.

After the game, we went to get our clothes. Half of the adults and all of the boys in town gathered in front of the barber shop —

waiting for us to come out. Our coach came back and said, "Boys, I've had our cars pull up in the alley back of this room — so grab your clothes and let's get the hell out of town. If we don't leave, we're going to have a bloodbath in the street. They're mad and waiting!"

We split, and dressed in the cars on our way back to Childress.

This was the general feeling wherever we played. It wasn't a game, it was war — pure and simple.

Once in a game with Memphis, I was thrown out for trading punches with one of their players. Years later, I was reminiscing with one of their halfbacks. I reminded him of that incident. "Yes, that was one of our subs. The coach had drilled him all week on how to get you riled up so you'd get thrown out. It worked quicker than we thought."

Another game was with McLean. Their fastest back had his nose broken a few games before. He was wearing a rubber nose guard. It was hard rubber, shaped over his nose. An elastic band went around his head to hold the top, and he held a flange on the bottom with his teeth. It gave pretty fair protection.

Before we lined up to kick off, I called a huddle and told our team, "Lay off his nose. He's a real nice old boy, and we're good friends."

"Gotcha!" they all said. It took almost five minutes until they "gotcha'd" him. His nose was up under his eye.

Later on, the boys at the railroad shops got up a semi-pro football team. They had some big bruisers who could buck a railroad engine. They matched a game with a team in a nearby town. Bill Sutherland was the captain of the shop bunch, and he came to see me. I had played with Bill the first year I was in Childress.

"Boody," he said, "We've got two backs on the shelf. Would you and another of your backs play with us tomorrow? You won't get much, but you'll get a good beer party after the game."

"If we're not stove up tomorrow, and if you promise to list us by fictitious names. I don't want to become ineligible."

My team played that afternoon. I told one of the half-backs, and he was all for it — so the next day we went with the pros.

They kicked off to us. In about four plays, we scored. We kicked to them. They didn't make a first down, so punted. In a few plays, we scored again. Bill got us in a huddle and said, "Look, these guys are planning a big party for us tonight. If we beat 'em, we'll have to fight instead of dance — so let's let them win!"

They scored twice — then we made another. It was a scoring bee, but they finally won by six points. I got five dollars and all the beer I wanted.

My Mother's brother, Uncle Booker, was my favorite. When he was a young man, he lost an eye at the railroad shops, but it didn't slow him down. He got a glass eye and a job managing a pool hall. Whenever a stranger came in, Booker would go into his act. He'd take a wooden kitchen match and poke it up under his glass eye. Then he'd go over to the stranger. "Friend," he'd say. "It feels like I've got something in my eye. Do you see anything?"

"Holy mackerel, man! Don't move! You've got a match stuck in your eye."

That always tore the regulars up. If the guy fainted, it put them on the floor. They thought Book was a real card.

One night, Booker got into a fight. His opponent jabbed the butt end of a pool stick into his good eye. The eye swelled shut almost instantly. I always thought Book must have heard this some place — but he shouted, "Somebody turn on the lights! This fight has just started!"

Ringwood, Oklahoma had about 250 citizens, and for my money, came up with an idea that was better than the wheel.

My Mother's sister and her husband ran a small grocery store there in 1918. There was only one block of business buildings, and a hardware store was in the center of things. Back of the hardware store was a large yard enclosed with a high board fence. In the dead center of this yard, they constructed a one-hole outhouse. It was put together with pegs, and a wire pull would collapse all four walls — they fell outward just like a house of cards.

There was no television then, and no theatre in town. The townsfolk had to make their own amusement. When a salesman came to town, everyone knew it and was ready for action. They even got on the telephone party line and called up nearby farmers.

"We've got a live one," they'd say, "Come if you can." Sooner or later the salesman would ask where the boys' room was. "Up back of the hardware. It's the only one on the street."

He'd go to the outhouse. They had a bell in front of the hardware, and when it rang, all the male citizens would rush to the back yard. They'd form a big circle around the outhouse, and when they figured the guy was in the middle of his task, they'd jerk the wire!

When the walls fell, all the poor guy could see were all those eyes staring at him. Of course, it startled the wits out of the poor man, and he'd always jump up and take a few steps. If the women on the street heard the men yell, they knew the guy had tripped and fallen. They couldn't think of anything funnier than some guy groveling in the dirt with his pants wrapped around his legs!

It's a fact that a woman can run faster with her dress up than a man can with his pants down.

Christmas season always makes one love his fellow man more than he might in July. A good friend and I dropped in a Childress restaurant one cold night for a hamburger and a cup of coffee. It was bitterly cold, and the heat inside was doubly welcome.

While waiting for our order, an old gray-haired man came in. He was bare-headed, and only had on a short suit coat. His collar was turned up, and he was hunched down in his coat as far as he could.

"I'm almost froze to death. I just fell off that freight train in the yards --- B-r-r-r. Give me a cup of coffee."

The old man sat down about a dozen stools away from us. "It's Christmas," I said to my friend, "and that old bum is colder than an Eskimo's nose — I'll go halves with you and buy him a steak!" My friend agreed that it would be nice, so I walked down to the old man.

"Sir," I said. "I heard what you said about getting off that freight. If you want a steak and some potatoes, you order it. My friend and I will pay for it."

That old man threw back his head, slapped his leg and howled! He really laughed.

"Son," he said. "I did get off that freight train — but it's a cattle train, and they're all my cattle."

In 1922, there were six Civil War veterans living in Childress. Old "Dad" Merrick was their selected leader. Almost every day they all walked down Main Street going to the Monogram movie house. One of them was an old Yankee soldier, and for a gag, they'd make him walk about ten feet to the rear. "No damn Yankee is gonna walk with us," they'd say.

And the old Yank would reply, "I'm not walking behind — I'm chasing these retreating cowards!" They were all the best of friends, and loved to kid each other. They'd sit on the front row at the movie and yell at the actors: "Watch that guy behind you — he's pulling a knife!" The other patrons would rather listen to the old men than watch the movie.

One day they were marching down to the show with the Yank bringing up the rear. A fellow on the street greeted "Dad" Merrick and said, "Dad, your pants are unbuttoned and your tally-whack is sticking out." "Dad" Merrick didn't miss a step. "It may be hanging out, Sonny Boy, but it sure ain't stickin' out!"

One Fourth of July, the Chamber of Commerce advertised that they were going to put on a three thousand dollar display of fireworks — a show that would make all previous shows seem like shooting off cap pistols. Streams of people started arriving at the football stadium an hour before dark. By nightfall, the stadium held almost every man, woman, and child in Childress County. This was going to do our country's birthday up proud — "in the rocket's red glare!"

Everyone had a Coke and hotdog — then leaned back to better see the first rocket burst in the night Texas sky. Down at the pit where the fireworks were stored, some idiot must have had more than a Coke to drink. He dropped a lighted punk in the wrong place, and the whole damn bunch of fireworks exploded with a mind-boggling, gigantic blast! Cokes were splashed on every summer dress in the stands, and hotdogs were squirted all over the football field.

When the smoke cleared, a calm voice came over the loud speaker, "That's it, folks! Better luck next year!"

While we're on the subject of explosives, let's go back to Ranger. One of Dad's good customers was a nitroglycerine truck driver. They joked about his dangerous job. I suppose a guy doing that type of work would have to joke about it or lose his mind.

He had breakfast, and when he paid his bill, he said, "John, that was a bang-up good breakfast. I'll see you when I get back from Hogtown."

His truck must have hit a hard bump just as it was starting to cross a little bridge. It blasted the bridge, the truck, and the trees all around it to smithereens.

A fellow told Dad about it. Of course, Dad knew, but he just had to ask, "Did it kill Josh?"

"They don't know," answered the guy. "They haven't found enough of him to tell!"

One summer, I was check-out for a grocery store. On Saturday every farmer who could move came to town. Most came in wagons, and they brought the whole family. They would buy their next week's groceries — but mostly just visit their other farmer friends. On Perkins Dry Goods Store corner, you'd have to walk in the street to get by. The farmers would squat for hours, thick as flies all over the sidewalk — visiting, whittling, and spitting.

Across the street from the grocery was the Monogram Theatre, and by bending over, I could look under the marquee and see a big Western Union clock next to the ticket window. You couldn't see it when standing straight.

The store was usually full of farmers, and someone would ask me, "What time is it?" I'd say that I didn't have a watch, but that I could tell pretty close by looking at the shadows under the cars out front.

I'd lean over and pretend to be studying the shadows, but really looking at the clock across the street.

"It's six—eight—no, make it twelve minutes after ten," I'd say.

Always, I'd see several men take out their pocket watches and check, then shake their heads at this marvelous feat. A farmer can tell pretty close to time by seeing the shadow of a fence post, but, by George, he couldn't hit it right on the head.

Soon, the same guy who had asked me the time would come back, and always he'd have four or five farmers following him.

"What time is it, Mr. Rogers?"

I'd do my act again and say, "Well, it's exactly — hmmm! It's nine — nine and a half — hmmm — six minutes before eleven!"

No one ever said a word — just checked their watches and left. This would go on all day every Saturday.

A friend of mine once followed a bunch of them and heard what they told their friends.

"You oughta go up to th' A&P and ask that kid the time. He can look at a shadow and tell yuh right to th' goddamn minute!"

"Bull corn!" they'd say — and here they'd come to witness the miracle.

I went over to Wellington to visit with an uncle and aunt. It's a small town, even smaller than Childress, if you can imagine that. It's so small that every person knows every other person — and the chances were good they were kin to each other. I learned right quick when I came to Childress, that when you were talking to a bunch of boys, you never said anything about a girl walking on the other side of the street. It was nine to five that you'd be speaking to her brother.

It was a warm night, and we were riding around trying to catch a cool breeze. A negro Holy-roller Church was holding a big meeting, so like half the town of Wellington, we went to watch. If you've never seen a Holy-roller meeting, you should. You've never seen so much jumping, dancing, and shouting before in all your born days. They really get with it, and in spades.

They had built a big, outdoor platform. They had chairs on one side, leaving plenty of space for anyone who suddenly felt the urge to jump and shout.

The townspeople pulled their cars all around it, and listened to the singing. It was nice, it was cool, and it was the only thing going on around Wellington that night.

Suddenly, a young black man jumped to the center of the platform. He danced and shouted for a few moments, then fell to his knees. Immediately, about twenty men and women formed around him and started dancing, singing, and shouting. "Hep him, Lord, — hep this po' boy — have mercy, Lord — hep him — hep him!"

This went on and on. A black man started past our car, and my uncle knew him.

"Is Tommy really trying to get religion?"

"Heck, no," answered the black man. "They is jest tryin' to cure his claps!"

Another time I went to Wellington to try and promote myself some cash. I made a deal with the theatre owner to fill his theatre for ten percent of the revenue.

I was going to put on a big "Hollywood Opening Night." I contacted the high school kids, and got them to impersonate Hollywood movie stars. One would be Ginger Rogers, another Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, Fatty Arbuckle, Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, Wallace Berry, et al. There was one fellow who ran "Goat's Cafe." He looked a lot like Slim Summerville. Goats said he'd be happy to help out.

On the night of the big opening, I got a floodlight to sweep the sky, just like they did in Hollywood. I had a small stage set up in front of the theatre with a microphone. All of the "stars" were over on the next street in front of Payne's Jewelry. A few would load in a car and arrive at the stage in style. We'd help them out of the car, escort them to the stage, introduce them, and then they'd go into the theatre and on back to the big stage.

The crowd in front would cheer each actor and actress, just like it was the real McCoy. Of course, each kid's parents were there. That's why we got as many kids as possible to be in it — hoping to sell more tickets.

When the last of the stars were introduced, the people went in. It was a "standing room only" crowd.

The actors would come out in pairs. I'd introduce Fred Astaire and Miss Ginger Rogers — BIG APPLAUSE! Then they'd speak a few words into the mike.

“Ah’m so glad to be in your fair city.” Then maybe Fred Astaire would click off a few steps and hope he didn’t fall on his prat.

At last, Goats came out. He had a high school girl hanging on one arm, and was carrying a car seat under the other. I introduced Slim Summerville and Miss Jean Harlow. That brought the house down. I asked them if they might like to say a few words to their fans.

Goats stepped up to the mike with the car seat under his arm. “All I’ve got to say is this — me and Jean here was out in the country, and somebody stole our car!”

Nobody laughed but the damned high schoolers. I almost swallowed my cud, because I knew the girl’s parents must be in the audience.

No one got shot, so I guess it was okay.

Farmers are not the only people who like to whittle, but if they’re not first, they’re just a shaving behind. In the early 20’s, Childress had telephone poles along the business streets. Two or three farmers would be leaning against one, just a-talkin’ and a-whittling’. The pole was big and easy to cut with their sharp pocket knives, so they cut away, not paying too much attention to their progress. By the time they realized they were cutting too much, the pole was falling down in the street!

A couple of guys would cut on one this Saturday. Next week, two new men would be near the pole. They’d notice the spot that had been cut — so, without thinking, they’d cut in the same place. Down came another pole.

The phone company got tired of this fun, so they started wrapping the poles with heavy wire as high as a man could reach.

The merchants put a few wooden benches in front of their businesses. They lasted as long as it took for a man to sit and visit, and absent-mindedly cut a notch in the seat — then enlarge the notch — and pretty soon, the bench would break in the middle.

Now whittling has become a lost art. Farmers are becoming an endangered species. The small “mama-papa” farm is fast disappearing. Bigness is the style. A small farm has a struggle to keep solvent. Someone puts a number of small farms together, buys a hundred thousand dollars worth of machinery, and gets one man to do the work instead of the previous ten. Instead of whittling, the old farmer is busy barbecuing steaks on the patio of his city home.

In bygone days, a farm town really jumped come Saturday. Something was always happening. Brother Hanley was a fair sample.

He farmed all week, but on Saturday, he turned preacher. His pulpit was on the corner in front of Perkins store. It was always crowded with farmers, so he had a captive audience.

Some of his best sayings were ones he used every Saturday:

"The young folks today are just bouncing into hell on rubber tires!"

"If you want to live to an old age, drink a gallon of water every day. Germs cannot live in water — they will drown!"

Cody Bentley worked in Alexander's Drug Store, which was next door to Perkins. On hot days, Cody would invite Brother Hanley in every half hour to have a cold root beer. Cody made Brother Hanley's drinks slightly different from the ones he made for cash customers. Instead of using carbonated water, he used Pluto water. Now, for those who are not familiar with Pluto water, it's a fairly strong purgative.

After about five Pluto beers, it became a problem for Brother Hanley to stay hitched. It would hit the brother in the middle of a sermon, and he'd light a shuck for the men's room in Alexander's. His audience never did know why the preacher would quit right in the middle of a word and run for the drug store.

Brother Hanley couldn't understand it, either. He told Cody that it was strange it only happened on Saturdays when he was preaching.

"Maybe you've sinned some way," said Cody, "and the Lord is punishing you."

"I can't imagine what it would be," worried the preacher, "unless it's talking mean to my mules sometimes."

Another Cody prank had to do with the alley back of the drug store. The drug store wasn't as deep as the buildings on either side, so back of the drug store was a small alcove. You could stand in there, and you would be shielded from any eyes up or down the alley. There was also a telephone pole that you could get behind.

Sometimes, fellows caught in a bind, would duck around there and let nature call. They usually let it go against the pole.

Mr. Alexander didn't like it, so Cody said he'd put a stop to it. He wrapped some copper wire around the pole at about the right height, and concealed the lead-in wire that ran to the prescription room. It was plugged into a wall socket, and the switch was by a window that looked out on the pole.

It wasn't long until a fellow came down the alley, stepped into the alcove, and got back of the pole. Cody watched, and when the guy had everything turned on, he threw the switch. The shock must have been terrific. The man jumped out from under his hat, and landed ten feet backwards on his back.

The word spread fast. "Don't go around that pole back of Alexander Drug. It kicks worse than a stud hoss!"

On Saturday, the big farmer boys would head for the drug store as soon as they got to town. Usually, three would come in together and line up in front of the fountain. The clerk knew exactly what they were going to have, but to be polite, he'd ask.

"I don't know. What are yuh gonna have, Hank?"

"I haven't made up mah mind yet. What're yuh havin', Hard?" They always pronounced Howard as "Hard."

"Well, let's see," said Hard. "I think I'll have a strawberry ice cream sodar!"

"That's fine fer me, too."

"Okey-doke, make mine the same."

So three strawberry (country red) ice cream sodas were set before them. They'd finish them, and one farmer would pay for all three. Then one of the others would say, "Let's have another — on me, this time."

So they'd drink another. The third guy would say that the next round was on him. I don't know how they did it, but they'd always drink until each had bought a round. You can't knock them. They're the guys who feed and clothe us all.

Next they'd probably mosey up to Penney's or Perkins and look at the cowboy hats. The reason farmers and cowboys wear their big hats rolled up on the sides is so three of them can ride in a pick-up at the same time. If the brims were out straight, they'd punch each other's eyes out. About the only time they take them off is when they go to bed. Even then, they're kept handy. If the house caught on fire at night, they might run outside in their drawers, but they'd have on that hat!

If they go into a cafe, even with their ladies, they sit with their big hats on. They're not about to let someone step on it, sit on it, or steal it. It's their badge, and by God, they're gonna wear it!

Vester Collins worked at the Harrison Drug for many years. The reason I know so much about drug stores is because us drug store cowboys hung out in them a good deal of the time.

Vester was a grown man, but had never driven a car. Most kids could drive when they were big enough to look over the dashboard. A license was not required back then.

Several fellows and Vester went to Wichita Falls one Sunday to watch a baseball game. Coming home, one of the men said, "Let's teach old Vester to drive."

Vester didn't care too much for the idea, but finally consented to try it. He was going up the road pretty good — he was keeping it in the middle, and steering a true course. They hadn't passed a car for thirty miles, but finally one came into view going the same way they were going. Vester overtook it, and crashed into the rear end.

"Why th' hell didn't you go around him?" they asked.

"Why th' hell didn't he move over? — He surely heard me coming!"

Mr. Harrison also stocked some gifts in his drug store. One item was a set of fourteen carat gold rimmed dishes.

Vester was a very meticulous person. The drug store floor was white tile. Vester would stack the ice cream chairs on the tables, and scrub it three or four times a day. He just couldn't stand to see a dirty foot print on that floor. He'd also get all those gold rimmed dishes down and polish them once a week. The dishes never sold, so for five years, Vester polished them and kept them looking like a twenty dollar gold piece. It finally got to where he could hardly stand to look at them, but he kept shining them, hoping some fool would buy them.

Vester got married, and Mr. Harrison gave him a big boxed gift at the reception.

When Vester opened it, sure enough, it was those gold rimmed dishes!

Mr. Harrison once told me of his first trip to Ft. Worth. He was a big-footed, gangling boy, and had never seen a street vehicle larger than a wagon.

He was spellbound by the street cars coming down the street, clanging their bells. He was standing on the curb watching them when a nice looking fellow tapped him on the shoulder.

"Mister," he said, "Would you like to drive one of those street cars?"

"You're not just a-wolfin'," answered Harrison. "That would really be somethin'!"

"Then, you're hired. I've been looking for a smart young man like you. First however, you'll have to have a motorman's hat — so if you'll give me ten dollars, I'll run get your hat, and you can take over the next car.

Harrison gave him the ten. "I waited for that guy until after dark," said Harrison. "I never did see the fool again. I guess he forgot what corner I was on."

Two ladies were touring through Texas, and pulled over to the side to change drivers. When they opened the doors, several big grasshoppers hopped in their auto. When a grasshopper hops, he very seldom changes course. If a buzzard was standing in front with his beak open, Mister Hopper would go right down the hatch.

The two ladies were afraid to get back in the car, so they were standing out in the bar ditch, up to their knees in weeds. A highway patrol car stopped, and the officer asked if they were having trouble.

"Yes," they both answered. "There's some big brown bugs in our car! Will they hurt us?"

The officer looked inside and said, "No, those grasshoppers won't hurt you, but those rattlesnakes in the weeds will!"

Both ladies jumped into the car, slammed the doors shut, and drove off with their grasshoppers.

Pete Kinney is another character who did Childress proud. I've known Pete since I was a little boy. He is now retired from the Post Office, and I see him each day, taking his daily walk.

When he was younger, he was a real cutter! His men-folks were all railroaders, and his mother ran a rooming house right next to the railroad. Her customers were mostly trainmen.

Pete ran wild. He had a little dog that stayed right at his bare heels, and Pete was always on the go. Everyone knew little Pete and liked him, but Pete never had time for Sunday School or Church. He always wanted to find out what was going on around the next corner.

One Sunday, Pete entered the Church of Christ and started down the aisle. The preacher stopped his sermon and said, "Come right on down to the front, Pete, and sit down. I'm glad to see you coming to church."

Pete put everyone in the aisles when he answered in a loud voice, "I ain't comin' to church, I'm lookin' for my damn dog!"

Another truism about Pete was when he threw a railroad switch. The switch was on the tracks right in front of the Kinney rooming house. Pete saw the brakeman throw that switch every day, so one day when he saw a freight train coming, Pete ran over and changed the switch. The train jumped the track and stacked Main Street full of boxcars. No one was injured, but it made several wagon teams run away. Nothing was ever done about it — you can't throw a four-year-old kid in the penitentiary.

Later, when Pete was in high school, he slipped in the school house one night, and took a print of the Declaration of Independence

out of its frame. He signed it right under John Hancock's name, then hung it back in its proper place.

Two years later, a class was being tested on how many signers they knew. A boy got up and said, "John Hancock, Pete Kinney, Thomas"

"Wait a minute," said the teacher. "There wasn't any Pete Kinney."

"The heck there wasn't," said the boy, and he got the print down and showed her.

You can get a bet on almost anything in Childress — who can spit further, who can throw a cowchip further, or especially, a bet on a football game.

For several years running, the Amarillo High School "Golden Sandstorm" team ruled the roost in Texas. They were State champs two or three times. While they were on their hot streak, they had a game with Quanah. The day before the game, several Amarillo men came into Preston's Clothing Store where there were always a bunch of men and boys shooting the breeze. This day, about twenty guys were sitting around yapping away.

"Would any of you gents like to bet on tomorrow's game between Amarillo and Quanah?" asked an Amarillo man.

"How many points will you give?"

"Twenty-five!"

Man, that was a pretty good spread — so everyone placed a few dollars.

When the betting finished, one of the Amarillo gamblers said, "Now, would anyone be interested in fifty points?"

Everyone was interested in that, so a few more bets were placed.

"I hate to keep this up, but does anyone have any dough that says Amarillo won't beat them seventy-five points?"

The crowd emptied their billfolds on that and got it all covered.

"Now, how does this sound? I'll give one hundred points, and that's as high as I'll go!"

All the loafers told the guys to stay right there. They went out and borrowed money from anyone they could get to listen. They came back and got it all covered.

The next day, Amarillo scored one hundred and two points to Quanah's zero!

The next year, they played again. Amarillo only beat them eighty-five to nothing. Quanah said, "Well that proves one thing — We're getting better!"

I think the most conceited fellow I ever knew was Sebastian Whiteside. He had a large framed picture of Jesus hung over his bed. In the lower righthand corner it was autographed — “To my very good friend, Sebastian, from your pal, Jesus Christ.”

While I was in high school, I'd usually go to wherever Dad was during the summer. The summer of 1925, Dad was in Miami, Florida. He sent me train fare, so I joined him. The train got to New Orleans, and they ran several cars at a time on a barge, and hauled us across the Mississippi. Then on to Jacksonville, Florida, and down to Miami. I got in there after dark, and several people were standing around the depot in bathing suits. This is my kind of place, I thought.

Dad met me, and the next morning he put me to work waiting counter. My station was the back half of the counter, about ten stools and the two back tables. During meal times, I really had to pick 'em up and lay 'em down. I didn't have time for any extra talk or foolishness.

One morning at breakfast, a man ordered two eggs and bacon. The counter was full, so I was rushing. When I brought him his two fried eggs and bacon, he shoved them back toward me and said, “I ordered scrambled eggs!” He hadn't, but I didn't have time to argue. I took them back and told the cook to give me “scramble two.”

When the eggs were ready, I took them out and placed them in front of the customer. He shoved them right back at me and said, “Do you think I'm a fool? You took those fried eggs and cut them up. I want scrambled eggs!”

Now there is no possible way to cut up fried eggs and make them look like scrambled eggs. I was twenty years old, had been playing football and basketball, and was fit as a fiddle.

I shoved them back to the guy, leaned over the counter, and said, “Look, you crazy bastard! Eat the goddamned eggs or I'm going to hit you in the head with this sugar bowl!”

The guy ate the eggs, and I couldn't believe it . . . He left me a dime tip!

I wasn't too crazy about working in the cafe — it was too confining. I was walking down the street and saw a ‘help wanted’ sign in front of the Armour Packing Company. I turned in and asked about the job. The fellow asked me what I knew about meat.

“I don't know anything about the meat business, but I'm willing to start at the bottom and work my way up!”

"You're the kind of man we want," he said. "Can you drive a truck?"

"Yessir," I replied.

"Okay. Report tomorrow morning at seven and I'll put you on a truck."

I told Dad, and he said to go ahead. The next morning I was there — raring to go. I was told to help a man load the truck with meat. Wow! Have you ever tried to lift a hind quarter of beef? It'll give you a hernia right down to your feet, and every place between. I got the meat up on my shoulder, and I think I walked to the truck on my knees — and had to put it on a hook yet!

We finally got the truck loaded, and they handed me a bunch of invoices and said, "Deliver 'em!"

Now I had been in town all of five days. I didn't know where any street was, and certainly not any of the stores, hotels, or cafes named on the bills.

I drove all over Miami and Miami Beach. I'd stop and ask somebody directions, but they were just like me — "Sorry, Bud, I just got to town."

It was during the first big land boom in Miami, and the town was full of strangers. I was getting worried. It was hot, and my truck wasn't refrigerated, and all that meat back there just a-steaming. I could imagine all the telephone calls the company was getting, "Where's my meat?"

I was frantic. I drove until noon, and still not one delivery. Why they didn't send someone with me the first day, I can never understand. I finally solved my problem. I backed the truck up to the company dock, jumped out, and ran like hell!

I went back to slinging hash for Dad. Almost every place in Miami closed from two until five o'clock — siesta time. I went over to Miami Beach and went swimming. I loved that clean water. It was as clear as a bath tub. You could stand neck deep and see your feet, and it was as warm as toast. There were only about two hotels on the beach then, and all of the beach was open and free.

In about two weeks, a good pal from Childress came to join me. His name was Curtis Coley, and in our ramblings we met two congenial boys from Mississippi. They had a Chevy auto, so now we had wheels and could really move around. We'd all get together each night after work and toss a coin to see what we'd do — heads, we'd go swimming — tails, we'd get drunk. If it stood on edge, we'd go to church. Usually, we went swimming or got drunk.

One hot night, it came up tails, so we started making the drinking clubs. Prohibition was in then, but Miami Beach didn't seem to know about it.

The last I remember, we were all toasting the Statue of Liberty, or the Gulf of Mexico, or something. When I suddenly came to my senses, I was standing in the Atlantic Ocean right up to my neck. I was wearing a stiff-brimmed, flat top, sailor straw hat, and it was "going to seed" around my ears. I had on my best shoes and a seersucker suit. The other boys were lying on the beach. We couldn't remember where we had left the car, but reasoned that it must be nearby, because surely we wouldn't walk very far in our condition.

We finally found the Chevy parked back of a speakeasy. Now we had no keys. The driver had lost them on the beach. We were all broke, so started walking back to Miami. Just as we were reaching the Miami side of the causeway, light was peeking out of the east. I just had time to shave and dress for work.

My mouth tasted like I had just swallowed a garbage truck, and my eyes were up in orbit somewhere. I held on to the door facing and swore I'd never take another drink.

I told Coley to report that I was sick — that I was going to bed — then I knew I couldn't let Dad down that way, so I went to work. But I died several times before Siesta time — Yeccccchh!

In a few days, Coley got a job helping to build some stucco houses. He said I could get on also. I made it right with Dad and went to work building up greater Miami.

Our job was standing on a scaffold, pouring cement in the window forms. A colored man would hoist the buckets up to us with a block and tackle. Coley and I would speak pig latin to each other, and the colored guy wanted to know, "What language is y'all talkin'?"

I told him it was French. "Ah've aw-ways wanted t' talk French," he said.

"It's easy," we told him. "We'll teach you how to talk it for five dollars."

"It's a deal," he said. "All ah want t' know is how t' proposition one of dem French babes! Heah's y' five bucks."

We taught him French in five easy lessons. I often wondered if the French babe he propositioned could speak pig latin.

Pouring cement turned out to be a little more than child's play, so Coley and I started shopping for another job. We saw a 'help wanted' sign in Spears' Confectionery on Flagler Street. We went in, and the manager wanted to know our experience. I told him I had never had experience working with a fountain, but I was a cafe waiter.

“That’s what we need — table-hops!” he replied. “Be here at seven in the morning.”

At seven we were bathed, shaved, and ready for action. Spears’ seated a hundred customers at twenty-five tables. Ordinarily, there were five hops, but this morning no one showed up but Coley and me. By seven-thirty, every seat in the house was full. There was a boy in the pantry making toast and heating sweet rolls. We didn’t know where anything was located. We found the silverware and butter, and the water cooler, but that was about all. We didn’t know the prices, but I told Coley to let the manager worry about that. He was standing by the cash register doing nothing — so that was his problem.

We started doling out stuff, but were just spinning our wheels, and going in circles. Everyone was calling, “Hey, boy, bring me —”. Then from another table they were yelling for something. We were swamped.

“We’re getting nowhere fast,” I told Coley. “I’ll take this half of the floor, and you take that half. Wait on only one table at a time, and don’t pay any attention to anyone else until you finish that table.”

We did just that, and before long we had everyone happy. Miami was like that all over. There were so many people who had suddenly come to town, and there weren’t enough places to feed them. I actually got pushed out of a cafe while I was trying to pay my bill. About ten people were waiting in front of the cashier with money in their hands when the manager said, “Move along, you’re blocking the door!” And with that, he shoved me out. I tucked my money away and went whistling down the street.

About nine o’clock some of the table hops started arriving. The boss came over to Coley and me and said, “I was watching you fellows operate. We don’t need these other waiters.”

“Then I quit!” and I started taking off my apron.

“I was only kidding,” said the boss. “But if I had a daughter, you both could marry her. I want to keep you in the family.”

After that, everyone came to work on time, so we had no more trouble.

Coley and I had a large room with a double bed and a half bed. Somewhere, somehow, we met a horse doctor. I can’t remember his name, so I shall call him Doctor X. The good veterinarian was at loose ends. He was really down in the lowest of dumps. His wife had divorced him after twenty years, and it was ripping him apart at the seams.

Anyhow, Coley and I both liked Doctor X when we first met him. He didn't have a place to stay, so we invited him to room with us. Three paying rent was better than two.

The first week was pretty rough on Doc. He couldn't seem to get his mind off of his ex-wife, so in order to calm him down, I suggested that he and I go deep sea fishing. I asked Coley to tell our boss that I was sick.

We went down to Biscayne Bay, and got on a boat that took about twenty people out. You couldn't deep-sea fish — too many people in the way — but it was fun watching the swordfish splashing around, and trying to keep from hooking a seagull. Those rascals would try to take your bait right off the hook.

I'll never forget the first time I took Coley down to Biscayne Bay to see the water. The most water he had ever seen around Childress was in Red River, and most of the time you couldn't find enough water in it to float a feather.

Coley had never seen a motor boat. One came along near us, and she was splitting the water pretty good. Coley said, "Look at that baby plow that sod!" That old saying, "You can't take the country out of the boy," was true!

Doc and I had a lot of fun, but didn't catch a fish. I got tired of baiting my hook, so stretched out on a deck chair to catch a little shuteye, and blistered my face.

I guess the day was good medicine for Doctor X. He seemed to steady down, and didn't talk about his wife so much. The next day wasn't too steady for me, though. When I went to work, the boss asked if I was feeling better.

"Yes, sir, but yesterday I was really under the weather."

"You look it, too," said the boss. "You must have had a very high fever to burn your face so badly."

Then he really chewed me. He said that he thought I was different from these other jerks that came to work only when some pleasure didn't interfere.

"The next time you want off, ask like a man. Don't send Coley crawling in to lie for you!" His bawling out did me some good. I never again used the excuse of being sick to avoid work, but, believe, me, I've gone to work with some beautiful hangovers.

Once in the army, I had to instruct an early class. I managed to get there somehow under my own steam. When I walked into the classroom, all the men were there and seated. I stepped to the podium and said, "All please rise." They did.

"Now, take off your helmets and place them over your hearts." They did that, too.

“Now bow your heads in reverence, because a dying man is standing before you.”

They all laughed and sat back down. I said, “Everyone be as quiet as you can for about ten minutes, and let me try to get my head back together.”

Everything rolled along fine in Miami, and then one night, Doctor X didn't come home. We were worried because Doc wasn't prone to prowl or drink. We were afraid he had gotten mugged or something.

Just after sunrise, Doctor X came staggering in and fell on his bed. His face and hands were bleeding, and his clothes looked like a hula skirt. They were ripped to shreds.

“What in the world happened to you, Doc?” we both asked at once.

“You name it,” he said. “I've been running through the swamps all night. Some guys asked me if I'd help unload a whiskey boat from the Bahamas, so to forget my troubles, I went along. We were unloading the boat when the law came up, and I took off through the bushes. It made me forget my troubles, all right — all I was thinking about was seeing that some alligator didn't bite my ass off!”

Doc had some medications in his little bag, so he tended his wounds and hit the sack. “I'm going to sleep for a week,” he said. Coley and I went to work.

When Curtis Coley went to sleep, he really slept. We had bought a cheap alarm clock to wake us for work, but it didn't faze Coley. I'd call him, but he wouldn't twitch an eye. Then I'd try shaking him. That was like standing in the back of a shooting gallery — he'd growl like a bear and swing both fists. You had to jump back quick, or you'd get one in the kisser!

Miami is very hot in the summer time. We didn't have coolers or anything, so we all slept naked. Now Coley was a young, vigorous man — and ready for love, so early in the morning his private was always standing at rigid attention.

I was having a hard time getting him awake. I'd shake his arm and jump back. Nothing. Doctor X watched me for awhile, then walked over to the bed and said, “Sit over on my pad, and I'll show you how to wake Mr. Coley.”

Doc fixed his thumb like he was going to shoot a marble — then thumped the head of Coley's private hard enough to knock it across the Gulf of Mexico.

Holy Codfish! Coley sprang out of that bed like someone had shoved a red hot poker up his rear. He stood in the middle of the

room, holding his cock, and looking at it like he'd never seen it before.

Doc and I were sitting on Doc's bed. I asked, "What th' hell's wrong, Coley?"

"I don't know," said Coley, "but you wouldn't believe the pain I just had. God! It was awful!"

From then on, Doctor X would do his thumping act every morning. Coley would hit the deck with one mighty bound. He'd hold the poor thing, and just look at it for five minutes.

"I just don't understand it," said Coley. "I always use a rubber. If this keeps up, I'm going to a doctor."

One morning Doc didn't get out of the way in time. Coley came out of bed and knocked him up against the wall. "I'm sorry, Doc, but when that pain hits, I've gotta move. It's terrible. It goes clear through me."

I never told Coley how he was being awakened, but if he reads this now, he knows. Forgive me, Coley, and old Doc, too. We just had to get you to work.

Dad had sold his cafe, and we were going back to Texas. Coley decided he would stay in Miami, and might try to get a job as a streetcar motorman. We went to the car barns and found the main office. He was hired, but was told he'd have to get cleared by the company doctor.

Coley had one eye that could barely see light, and knew he couldn't pass. I took his paper, and let the doctor examine me. Coley passed.

Years later, I saw Coley in Venice, California. He told me that he never had an accident with his street car, but he sure had some near misses.

The last I ever heard of Coley, he was doing a soft shoe with a vaudeville troupe. I hope he's still clicking 'em off.

17

Speak of football, and you'll get plenty of conversation in Texas. Mention sex, and some guy will want to know what position he plays. If the Bible and football had a race, I'm afraid the Bible would run a poor second. Not that Texans don't like the Bible — they do, but whoever heard of the Bible throwing a forty yard pass?

When I played in Childress, we never got close to the State championship. We won more games than we lost, but that was our whole bag of glory. I'd have given a right ear to have played in a championship game, but now I just have to watch — and that isn't bad either.

Our kids played for the State championship both in 1975 and 1976. In 1976, they played the championship game in the Cowboy Stadium in Irving, Texas. We got beat, but, by golly, our kids were in high gear all the way. They won fifteen straight games, so they weren't exactly disgraced.

We were playing Stinnet in the bi-district game. At the half, we were behind. The second half, our kids clobbered them.

Next week, we were again behind at the half. The opposing team's spotters were in the press box and were laughing it up.

"I thought those guys could play ball. They're a bunch of pushovers!"

The Stinnett coach was listening. "Don't count them out," he said. "We thought the same thing last week — and the last half, we found out our heels were round."

Sure enough, the Childress boys murdered them in the last half.

Before the championship game in Irving, some Amarillo reporters came to Childress to find out why everyone went to every game.

"How come Childress goes all out for their Bobcats?" they asked a fan.

"Well," answered the fan. "I guess it's because there's nothing else to do in this damn burg!"

They also interviewed me. I told them that when I played, every person on both sides of the field stood up every time I carried the ball!!

"You must have been a great open-field runner," they said.

"No, not especially. But everyone stood because there wasn't a single seat in the joint!"

One time I broke loose and ran sixty yards for a touchdown. I was running down the right sideline, and naturally was keeping my eyes looking left for any tacklers. I heard what sounded like a wild buffalo stampede on my right. I looked, and there were at least 250 Childress fans running alongside of me. It was really very embarrassing, because some of 'em were passing me.

Now, I'm going to tell you a few things that happened to our teams over the years. You will either find them amusing, or you're an old grouch. Take your choice!

The first team Childress High School ever had was in 1912. They only played five games, but won them all and were not scored on. Joe Boyd, who weighed over 300 pounds, was the center. One game there was only one football. Boyd centered the ball back to the quarterback, who fumbled. Someone pushed Boyd, and he stumbled backward and fell on the ball. That was the end of the ball and the end of the old ball game.

Through the early years and on up through the Roaring '20's, football was as exciting off the field as on. We won some games, then lost some, and invariably ended up in a fight. The spectators, as well as the football players, always spent the last five minutes hammering hell out of each other.

When I was playing, Memphis and Quanah were our biggest, most-hated rivals. There was a band director that led both Memphis and Childress town bands, and he was a rabid football fan. He always attended our practice when he was in town. He'd tell us what the Memphis boys were planning for us.

"They're going to try and break your fastest halfback's leg!" he'd say. He told me once that two players swore that before the game was many minutes underway that they hoped to break my passing arm.

Then he'd tell the Memphis boys how we planned to butcher them. All he wanted was to see a knockdown and dragout football game.

There was a farmer living near Quanah who was once a big star at Texas University. We got him to referee several of our games. We thought he was as fair and square as they came. To my knowledge, he never made a single bad call.

For some reason that escapes me now, Quanah lost their coach in mid-season. They were desperate. Someone suggested that this farmer knew football, and maybe he'd help out. He agreed, and

coached the remainder of the season.

The rest of this story I know to be true, because the Quanah quarterback, a kid I'd played with in Ranger, confessed it to me this past year.

We were to play Quanah, and the referee didn't show up. Quanah suggested that their coach had called many of our games, so why not let him referee. We knew that he was fair, so we agreed.

He called a good game as always, with one small difference. When Quanah had the ball, he'd place it on the scrimmage line, and then walk back to his spot. As he passed my friend, the Quanah quarterback, he'd say out of the corner of his mouth, "Call play 36." He not only called the game, he called every play in the game. He listened to what I called in the huddle. If we were going right, he'd place his right hand on his hip. If it was a pass, he'd adjust his cap! Is it any wonder that we lost the game??

In 1947, Childress was to play Lubbock: Before the game, our coach went to the Lubbock dressing room to visit their coach. When he returned to the Childress dressing room, he told the team, "Lubbock has a big sign in their dressing room which reads — 'Lubbock, 47, Childress, O!' Is that the way it's going to be?"

"Hell, no!" yelled the team, and they dashed out to the field with blood in their eyes.

When the final gun was fired, the score was Lubbock, 47, Childress, O!

One year, Childress had the smallest team in its history. All the big boys went out for the band. We didn't win many games, but we had the loudest brass section in West Texas!

Times had changed since my playing days. In those days, whenever a time-out was called, our waterboy would come dashing out to our huddle with a dipper and a bucket of water. Now they have Gatorade, individual cups, oxygen bottles — all the comforts of home. Then, we got a little resin to keep our hands from slipping on the ball, a slap on the back, and a drink from the dipper.

The rules used to be that once you left the field, you couldn't return until the next half, so the guys got pretty cruddy. Their lips would be bloody, caked with dirt and spit, and it certainly didn't make you want to drink from where eleven of those lips had been! When I was given the dipper, I would always turn it around and drink over the handle. Then one day I noticed that everyone felt the same as me — they all drank from over the handle!

Doctor Fox was the team physician for many years. One year, in his early days with the team, the boys seemed very nervous —

fumbling almost every other play. The coach wondered if a tranquilizer given before the game might settle the kids down. Equanial tablets had just come out on the market, so they decided to experiment with them on the ball players. They tried them out during the week and noticed that the players did seem to settle down some.

The night of the game with Phillips, all the boys took their tablets before going on the field. Phillips kicked off, and the Childress kids just stood watching the ball. It bounced around and finally stopped on the five yard line. Still nobody moved. The coach was frantically running on the sideline, waving his arms and yelling.

"What's eating the coach?" asked one of the halfbacks.

Another player, closer to the coach said, "I think he's saying something about that ball over there."

"Well, tell the coach to go suck rocks," said the halfback.

The team played tranquilly all during the first half, but during the last half, it finally wore off. The Equanial experiment was finished for good.

To stop the fights between the fans, each town now sits on opposite sides of the field. One game, the fans brought along a cannon to be fired whenever their team scored. They placed it at about mid-field, alongside of their pep squad.

The game went on, neither side making a score. Along about the third quarter, the other team started a good drive.

Our coach called a player over and told him he wanted him to get in there and stop their best ground gainer. Just then, this best ground gainer swung around end and was running down the sideline with nothing in front of him but the goal line. As he passed the bench, our hero dashed on the field and laid a tackle on him that was heard in the next county. The tackler thought the coach had meant for him to go in right then.

The officials ruled that the runner had scored regardless — which was the correct decision.

A few plays later, one of our backs went over right tackle and broke clear. He was racing down the enemy's sideline, and when he got even with the cannon — their gunner fired!

The concussion got him square in the face, knocked the ball out of his arm, and he fell flat. Our coach protested, but the officials ruled that the gun wasn't on the field, and was just another noise of the game.

A kid coming off the bench to stop a touchdown is one thing, but a cannon yet??

Football sometimes makes people do things that are completely against their nature. A case in point is Miss Stacey Belle. No one ever called Miss Stacey Belle just 'Stacey' or 'Belle.' It was always Miss Stacey Belle, because you wouldn't think of being so bold to a lady of her caliber.

Miss Stacey Belle was a seamstress and owned a small ladies shop. She stocked ladies' dresses, (not pant suits, because they wouldn't be proper wear for ladies) and a few ladies' undergarments. She wouldn't dare show a pair of lacy panties in the show window, because young boys might look! She taught a Sunday School class and had a twenty-five year perfect attendance pin which she took great pride in wearing.

Miss Stacey Belle almost got married once. She was very smitten on the young man, but he couldn't quite live up to her standards. He liked to take a wee sip now and then; he smoked cigars, and was known to bet a buck or so on the bangtails. She tried to reform him, but finally gave up and broke off the romance. She joined the Women's Club for business reasons, but wouldn't attend because they played bridge and '42' and she had heard that they sometimes bet 25c per corner.

Miss Stacey Belle was just a very nice, refined lady, no two ways about it, until she went to a football game which was to decide the district championship.

Our team was three points ahead with less than one minute to play, and the other team was eighty yards away. It looked like we had it in the bag with the bag sewed up tight! Suddenly they completed a jump pass over the line to an end who was running against the grain. He broke free and had an open field ahead with nothing but seventy yards of green grass between him and the winning score.

The Childress fans were stunned into a deathly silence. Our very religious, pious lady sprang to her feet, and shouted, "For God's sake somebody, stop that son-of-a-bitch!"

A boy with flaming red hair moved to town in 1933 and changed the whole complexion of Childress football. Up 'til then, we had no stadium or lights for night games. We had no grass; nothing but dirt, rocks, and plenty of sandburrs. We had plenty of standing room, though, and after a few games, you couldn't see over the crowd unless you were in the Goodyear blimp.

A couple of newspaper sports reporters first spread the word about the new weapon of the Childress Bobcats. People from all over the Texas Panhandle started driving hundreds of miles to see this

new kid run. Then the news spread all over Texas. The city papers started telling about "The Red Raider," and next the colleges heard, and they sent scouts to look over this phantom. No high school boy could be as good as he was touted to be. That's what they said at first, but after seeing him go, all the universities were interested. The two who were really pressing were Texas University and Notre Dame.

At the first game that Leonard "Red" Ratican played, one Catholic priest was a spectator. By the fourth game, there were a dozen priests in the stands. Notre Dame wanted him bad, and they sent the Fathers to corral him.

Many times "Red" ran for a touchdown the first time he handled the ball. In one game, he ripped off runs of 25, 67, 14, 70, 59, and 26 yards to score six touchdowns. He set up another, but insisted another boy carry it over.

On many of his runs, he reversed his field several times to finally get over the goal line. It was estimated that he ran 205 yards on one run.

They were playing a team which boasted an all-district tackle. They punted to "Red" on the twenty yard line. He ran laterally to the south sideline, saw he was trapped, reversed his field, and ran laterally toward the north sideline. The all-district tackle missed a tackle. "Red" was hemmed in again, so came back across the field. The big tackle missed the second time as "Red" flashed by. Again "Red" was trapped, so he started back north. The opposing coach was yelling at his star tackle, "Get up, Blue! Get up — here he comes again!"

Blue got up and missed again for the third time. The "Red Raider" then got free and ran eighty yards for a score.

Then all the stars in Heaven went black. "Red" was gang tackled by about six men. When they unplied, the "Red Raider's" collarbone was broken. He sat out one game, but the coach had the harness shop build a special guard for his shoulder. He took "Red" along to a very important game in Vernon. "Red" sat on the bench for three quarters. The coach had really taken him along hoping it would stimulate the rest of the squad. But time was running out, and Childress was behind 6 to 7. "Red" Ratican convinced the coach that the brace would give him plenty of protection. "I'll run out of bounds if I see that I'm going to be tackled."

Childress was backed up to their ten yard line. The standing-room-only crowd was chanting, "Send in Red."

Ratican went in. Then Childress moved into a quick-kick formation, with "Red" standing back of the goal line.

I was standing beside a Vernon fan. "He's going to kick," he said.

"Not necessarily, I answered, "That boy might come out of there."

"Red" did come out. He ran straight at the right tackle, then shot to his right and circled the end before going out of bounds 60 yards down the field.

The Vernon fan said, "That was a fluke. Our team expected him to kick."

The next play, "Red" ran for a touchdown. He handled the ball four times and made two touchdowns. He wasn't tackled once. He either ran out of bounds, or over the goal line. Childress won 20-7.

This was the story in all the games. "Red" wasn't the fastest kid on the block — but he was the quickest I ever saw. I saw "Red" Grange play, and I think "Red" Ratican was better.

When the All-Texas State team was selected, "Red" Ratican was the only unanimous choice. Notre Dame offered him a scholarship. He was a double-barreled cinch for All-American honors.

A post-season game with Amarillo was scheduled for no apparent reason but to give the fans one more look. People came from all over to see the "Red Raider" burn up the bushes. He did, and after one 45 yard run, he was forced out of bounds. He relaxed then, and an over-zealous tackler plowed into him. "Red's" knee was busted.

Notre Dame had him go to a small prep school, and had his knee operated on — but Leonard "Red" Ratican was never able to carry a football again.

The Bobcats don't have to play on rocks and sandburrs any more, and all the people have a seat around a well-lighted field.

I think I'll go have a Manhattan right now — and raise my glass to old "Red."

18

While I was still in high school, Dad opened a restaurant in Smackover, Arkansas. When summer vacation came, I first rode my motorcycle to Colorado — to the top of Pike's Peak. After getting that adventure under my belt, I returned to Childress to pick up my Grandpa, Sandy Booker McCraw. Grandpa was my Mother's father. When I was just a pup, I couldn't say "Grandpa," so for some reason I can't explain, I could say "Pappy-Craw." So that's what I called him, and Mammy-Craw was my grandmother.

Pappy-Craw wanted to go with me to Smackover, because it was near Camden. Two of his brothers were killed there during the Civil War, and he wanted to go there for sentimental reasons. Only one brother was actually killed there — the other was wounded there, but died from his wounds after reaching home.

I hooked my sidecar on for Pappy-Craw, and we got ready to ride. I had an extra soft aviator's helmet and goggles for him, but he refused them. He said we might get killed on the way, and he wouldn't be caught dead in those sissy things. So, he put on his big ten gallon hat, strapped on his "45" pistol in the shoulder holster, and said, "Let's head 'er for the barn!"

There wasn't much traffic then, so we rolled along at 70 miles per hour. Of course, I had on my helmet and goggles. Pappy-Craw was holding that big hat with both hands, and his eyes were just slits. Finally, he said that he would wear the extra goggles if I still had them — but he still wouldn't give up his big hat.

We were nearing Texarkana. It was a good graded road, so I was doing at least eighty. I was concentrating hard on the road when Pappy-Craw emptied his "45" almost in my ear.

I came within an ace of turning the whole works over. I thought all my tires had blown at the same time. When the explosions came, I turned off everything and almost stopped.

"What on earth are you shooting at, Pappy-Craw?"

"I was shooting at those telephone poles. I never saw anything go by so fast, and I just had to see if I could hit 'em!"

“Nobody could hit poles going by that fast, Pappy-Craw!”

“Maybe not, but I’ll bet I scared hell out of ‘em!”

When we rode into Texarkana, the streets were lined with people. They were standing on the curb like a parade was coming by. I asked the hotel clerk what was happening. He told us that the KU KLUX KLAN was going to march.

Pappy-Craw was as excited as a kid. He remembered the Klan when he was a young boy, and he couldn’t wait to get on the street.

We got a good spot, and pretty soon they came. There seemed to be thousands of them. Some were in cars — some were marching, and all of them were wearing their hoods with holes for their eyes. Many carried lighted crosses and torches, and the shadows made them look like dancing ghosts. It was really a weird, impressive effect.

I wondered back to the time when Jack and I wrote those letters in Breckenridge. If the Klan knew I had pulled that stunt, I’ll bet they would have put the lash to me then and there.

They did finally organize in Breckenridge and Childress, too, but they never got off first base. They were never very popular in Texas.

The next morning, we rode into Arkansas and headed for Smackover. We stopped for gas (three gallons), and the operator told us that the main road to Smackover was under water, but he thought we could go in the back way through Magnolia.

We arrived in Magnolia about noon, and when we came out of the restaurant, there were at least fifty men and boys looking at my Harley and sidecar.

“So that’s a motorcycle!” said an onlooker. “I’ve seen a picture of ‘em!”

“Yes, would you like to straddle it?”

Several men did, and all of the boys. One boy said, “I’ll bet you can burn the breeze with that boat!”

“I’ve had ‘er up to nearly 100!” That really impressed them. A Model T would do 40 going downhill with a good tailwind.

They told us how to get on the road to Smackover. “Don’t ride too close to them wild razorback hogs. They’ll eat your legs off.” They all waved us off. Magnolia was a friendly place, and a very pretty little town.

We found the road, and I gave ‘er the gun. It was a winding, sandy road, and the woods got thicker and thicker. I had the cut-out wide open, and the engine noise was vibrating through the trees like a machine gun in a cave.

They could hear us coming a long while before we came into view. We turned one curve in the narrow road, and up ahead there

was a rail fence in front of a cabin. Sitting or hanging on the fence were a dozen pickaninnies and several adults. They were all leaning over trying to see what was coming down the road. When we were even with them, I reduced the spark and gave it a quick change of gas to make the motor backfire. Three or four of the pickaninnies fell off the fence.

As we got farther into the woods, the sandy road gave way to a log corrugated road, then it turned to water. The motor started to stall, so I got off and ran alongside holding on to the handlebars. Sometimes the water was above the exhaust pipe, and I really ran and gunned the motor to keep it going. When we would reach a high spot, I'd stop and rest.

Pappy-Craw and I were both soaking wet and covered with mud. The sidecar was half full and made a good bathtub. I was really getting bushed. I decided I wasn't cut out to be a swamp boy.

I've checked several maps, and I can find no roads from Magnolia to Smackover, but by golly, there was one, even if we couldn't see it for the water. I just tried to stay in the middle where the trees had been cleared out. A bath sure was welcome that night in Smackover.

The next morning Pappy-Craw was still tired from the trip. After all, he was pushing eighty, and holding on to the cowboy hat all the way from West Texas would tire anyone.

Ned Malone, the fellow who had lost his money in the Ranger bank, said he knew just the place to revive our spirits. We rode in Ned's Caddy as far as the road went, then walked on a board and log path back into a thick woods. We came to a cleared space about as large as a living room, and in the middle was a rough-hewn table and benches.

Ned told the maitre'd we'd like the "specialty of the house." He disappeared back in the swamp, and pretty soon came out with a jug of white lightning (corn whiskey) and some tin cups. He poured each of us a cup full, and we started sipping. It was as clear as water, and mild.

Back in Texas, the moonshiners colored the "corn" with tobacco juice, or anything they could get. When you took a drink out of a fruit jar, the smell and taste would gag you. That's one reason people got so drunk. When you drank, you held your breath and really took a big swig. You didn't want to go to the well too often. Then when it started hitting you, you looked for someone to bust in the mouth. Every fruit jar of corn was filled with boxing gloves.

We drained our cups, and Pappy-Craw finally took off his hat. I don't suppose he had had a drink in thirty years. The maitre'd filled our cups again, and before long, we all joined in song —

“T for Texas, T for Tennessee,
T for Thelma, the gal who made a wreck out of me —”

We went back to the car, but Pappy-Craw couldn't keep on the log walk. He was muddy up to his knees.

I enjoyed being with that old man more than ever before, and I think he had a good time also.

We rode over to Camden. You couldn't see the woods for the trees, so didn't know for sure where the Civil War battle had been fought. Pappy-Craw walked around through the trees and felt better just for being there.

After a few days, he took a train for Texas. That old man was one in a million to me. George Washington didn't have anything on him. I don't believe he ever told a lie in his life, and when a man told him anything, it was gospel. If he ever learned that someone told him a lie, he'd never talk to that man again.

He was a perfect patsy for a con man. A man's word was his bond, so he'd believe anyone. A salesman called on him once in Childress and showed him some photos of grapefruit trees in Florida. The man sold him four acres at only five dollars a month, twenty years paid in full.

“I'm going to retire there,” he said. “Just lay on my back, reach up and pick me one of them grapefruits and suck it dry!”

He gave me the location of his land and asked me to look it over when I was in Florida. I found it. You couldn't get to it in a rowboat. It was back in the swamps — thirty feet under water.

When I returned to Texas, I told him it was beautiful. Fruit trees everywhere. He never knew. He died without ever sucking that grapefruit. But he did have a wonderful dream for the last thirty years of a very honorable life.

Smackover was very similar to all the other oil boom towns I had seen. It was mainly one long main street with all clapboard buildings and board sidewalks. The main difference was the trees. They were thick everywhere and grew right down to the street.

The streets were knee-deep in mud, and horses or mules couldn't pull a wagon of casing pipe through them. They worked six oxen to each wagon. The drivers waded alongside hollering “gee” and “haw” and cracking their long blacksnake whips.

I almost saw a lynching. A young colored man went to an outhouse and opened the door. A little girl was in there, and seeing a man so suddenly, it scared her and she screamed. Some men heard the child and ran to see what was the trouble. They saw the little girl running with her panties down — and screaming.

They didn't ask questions. They grabbed the poor fellow, and in a few moments, a mob formed. "The nigger was trying to molest a little girl! Hang the bastard!"

They took their victim to the platform of an oil derrick, put a rope around his neck, and threw the end over the first brace. I was almost hanging myself — stretching my neck, trying to see. A little guy grabbed the end of the rope and swung off the platform — trying to pull up the negro. The little guy wasn't heavy enough to pull the victim up. Before others could take hold to help, the child's mother came running. "Don't do it," she said. "The boy didn't know my daughter was in the toilet. It just frightened her."

The men disappeared quickly. I suppose they were ashamed at what they almost did. I know I was for even watching.

A big prostitute called Barrelhouse Sue was the queen mama of Smackover. She was big, mean, and when she said frog, everyone jumped.

She ate in the cafe, and since I was taking cash, we got fairly well acquainted. She asked me where all I had lived, about my school, and seemed very interested. One day she asked me if I liked to ride horseback.

"Some," I said. "But I can handle a motorcycle better."

A couple of hours later, during the dinner hour, Sue came riding up and was leading another horse. I was at the cash register, but I pretended not to see her. She called me a couple of times, and finally told a fellow to come in the cafe and tell me to come out.

The man came in, and I told him I couldn't leave — I was working. He carried that message back to Sue. She told him to come back in and tell me to get my ass out there, or, by God, she'd ride her horse inside and drag me out.

Dad heard her message, so he told me I'd better go out or she probably would ride inside. I went out and she cooled down some.

"Come on, Rogers. I've got you a horse."

"I'm sorry, Sue. I'd like nothing better, but I'm working and can't get away. Any other time."

“Okay, but I’ve rented these nags, and I’m gonna get my money’s worth.” She turned to the fellow she had used for her messenger. “Get your ass up here, Bub. Let’s go canter!”

Off they rode, sloshing through the mud.

A few days later, it was time for me to go back to school. Sue found out I was leaving. She came in and sat at the counter next to the register. “What th’ hell do you wanna leave for?”

“I’ve got to go back and play football. I’m the quarterback.”

“If you’ll stay here, I’ll wear you down to where you can’t pick up a football — and you won’t have to pay any rent, either.”

I could see myself sailing through a window, like that naked girl in Ragtown, whenever Sue got tired of me.

“I’d like to stay, Barrelhouse, but Dad says I’ve got to get educated.”

“I’ll educate you,” said Sue. “And then I’ll give you a post-graduate course. You’ll be a PhD before you can bat an eyeball.”

I left on my trusty motorcycle. I kinda hated to leave. Barrelhouse Sue did look kinda soft and round.

Football season was over, and most of us had our wounds nearly healed. The Charleston dance craze was coming on strong. Most of us could do some of the steps by holding on to a chair — when a real pro came to town.

He was a young man from Denver. He claimed to have won a contest there, and had a cup to prove it. He cut a “mean rug,” and when a Charleston contest was to be held at Lake Damsite, near Quanah, he wanted to enter.

They selected the winner by holding a hand over the contestants’ heads. The one who received the greatest applause won a twenty-five dollar prize. He asked four of us to go along and applaud like mad for him.

Jack Billingsley borrowed his Dad’s brand new Model T. On a long trip like this, we thought we should have some refreshments. So we went to Smokey Brown’s and bought two quarts of corn whiskey, then got some cream soda pop for chasers.

It was thirty-five miles to the dance floor at Lake Damsite, so we had plenty of time to “hit the jug” before arriving. Then too, the dance went on for some time before the big event, so we pretty well killed the refreshments.

The contest started. The dance hall lights were turned low to make it look more romantic. The dancers jiggled, kicked their feet

sideways, and really worked up a lather. When it became time to select a winner, the manager lined up the contestants, and started down the line holding his hand over their heads.

It was dark on the floor, and we were a little drunk — and frankly, we couldn't distinguish which one was our boy. We held a quick huddle and decided to clap for all of them so we wouldn't miss him.

To make a long story short, he didn't win. After a while, they played the saddest song ever played on a dance floor — "Goodnight, Sweetheart." We all loaded in the Model T and started home.

There was just a two-rut road from the lake to the highway. We were in a line of cars going at a snail's pace when another car, full of boys, sped around us, cut in short, and knocked off our left front fender.

Jack pulled the gas lever down on his Ford, and crashed into the rear fender of the car ahead. He backed off, then full-gunned into the other fender. That cleaned off both fenders of the other car, but we also lost our right front one. The other car pulled out of line, and crashed into our rear, shearing off our left rear fender while knocking off his right one. They left only one fender on each car, but before we reached Quanah, both of them were off.

The other car was full of Quanah boys, and when they pulled up to a cafe, we stopped also, and challenged them to do battle.

"Okay," they said. "Let's all get a cup of coffee, then we'll go out in the country and settle this."

That was only fair, so we all went in and lined up at the counter. One of the Quanah boys had an abnormally large head. I told him that when we fought, I wanted him. "With a head like yours for a target, I can't miss."

While we were having our coffee, Vernon Clay came in. He was the Quanah quarterback, and we were old friends from Ranger.

"You're just in time, Vernon. We're gonna fight these guys, and you can be referee."

"Hold everything! I've got friends on both sides. I'll pay for the coffee, and you fellows smoke the peace pipe."

The hot coffee cooled our tempers, so we drove on home. Jack never told me what he told his Dad about his four fenders — it must have been an "Oscar" winner.

An ex-Childress citizen came back to visit his parents. He was driving a big Packard. His clothes were of the latest cut, and he

smoked twenty-five cent cigars. Quite obviously, he had made it big — but no one knew how.

No one guessed that there was method in his madness. He was only putting up a front to have some fun. He had put the real gas tank under the rear seat, and a dummy one where the real one was supposed to be.

He drove into the first filling station on the east side and asked the boy attendant if the city water was pure.

“Yes, we have real good water.”

“Fine. Then put about two gallons in my gas tank.”

“But, sir! That’ll ruin your gas!”

“Here, let me do it.” He took the hose from the kid and squirted it into his dummy gas tank. Then he pulled a bottle out of his pocket, shook two tablets (probably aspirin) out and dropped them in the tank.

“What’s them?” asked the boy.

“Those are what turns the water into fuel. Help me shake the car to mix it good.”

The boy took hold of one fender, he the other, and they gave the Packard a good shake. He then got in the car, stepped on the starter, and drove out.

The kid ran in the office and told his boss, “You’d better sell this station the first chance you get. A man has some pills that turns water into gas!”

The gag was pulled all over town. Two station owners wanted to buy in on it, but he wouldn’t sell. He said he wanted to sell it to Texaco. “If they won’t buy it,” he said, “I’ll put in water stations all over the country and break them!”

They put their stations up for sale — but someone finally told them it was only a gag.

One night I went around to City Hall to see Roy. We were old school friends, and now he was working for the City. Everyone in the office had gone home, and Roy was just finishing up.

“Hey, Boody, how’d you like a drink of first class moonshine?”

“Well, since you put it that way, I wouldn’t want to hurt your feelings. Where did you get it?”

“I haven’t got it yet. It’s evidence, and they have it locked in that cabinet.”

“What do you mean, evidence?”

“They raid bootleggers and keep the evidence in there until they’re brought to trial.”

The cabinet was padlocked, but the doors had screwed-on hinges. Roy got a screwdriver, but first we made note just how the groove in the screw heads were pointing. Then, we unscrewed the hinges, pulled the door open, and selected the fruit jar.

This operation continued for several weeks until the cupboard was bare. When the first trial came up, they came for the evidence. All they found was an empty fruit jar with the man’s name on the tag. Of course, the charge was dropped.

I’ve never told this before either!

Five of us decided to take a trip out west. The route was planned through New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, and California. This story only concerns a spot in Arizona, and Reno, Nevada, where I was to leave the group.

Four of us had made it through high school and some college. The fifth man had maybe gotten through the second grade. He had a heart of gold, and he worked hard all his young life to make sure his younger brother got the education he himself had missed. Reading, writing, arithmetic, and especially geography were never on his hit parade. He had no conception of the map of the United States. He wasn’t sure that you didn’t go through Cincinnati on the way from Texas to Arizona.

We were sleeping on the desert one night, and Ben (not his real name, but it will suffice for this yarn) told me about the time he was bringing a carload of whiskey from Oklahoma to Childress, Texas. He said just after he had crossed the state line, the Texas police started after him. He gave the car all the gas it would take, and kept ahead of them. When he got to Childress, they were still on his tail — so he went on through town, and headed for Paducah.

Paducah is thirty miles due south of Childress, but to keep the conversation rolling, I pretended not to know where Paducah was.

“Why, Boody, what th’ hell’s th’ matter with you? You know where Paducah is. You’ve even played football there.”

“The name’s familiar, but I can’t seem to place it. Where is it from here?” We were a thousand miles from Paducah, but I wanted to see what he’d say.

“You know very well where it is. It’s thirty miles south of us.”

He didn’t have any idea where we were. In his mind, we were still on the outskirts of Childress.

Just after we crossed into Arizona, I mentioned that it might be interesting if we swung by Meteor Crater and took a look. Ben wanted to know what Meteor Crater was. I explained the best I could that a big rock had fallen from space and struck the desert. It had knocked a hole a half mile deep and a mile wide.

"Holy Christ!" said Ben. "I'll bet it scared hell outta the towns around there."

"Rattlesnakes, maybe," I said, "But it happened a million years ago. I don't imagine there were many people around."

The others agreed that we should go see it, but it was night when we reached the turn-off, so we decided to forego it. Ben was asleep in the back seat, and he didn't know we'd changed signals.

The next day, we turned north at Williams and headed for the Grand Canyon. We parked our car in a parking space and walked up to the canyon's brink. I have never seen it more beautiful.

Little white clouds were floating down in it, and the shadows and colors were out of this world. At the point where we were standing, the Canyon was a mile deep and seventeen miles across. It was awe-inspiring. It gave one a spiritual feeling, as if you were standing in the center of a giant cathedral with the sunlight shining through a million stained glass windows!

No one spoke for at least five minutes. A tap on my shoulder brought me out of my trance. I looked around and it was Ben.

"Do you mean to stand there," he began, "and tell me that a rock fell from Heaven and made this goddamned hole? Bull shit! I don't believe it!"

I could have pushed him in the canyon. He broke the spell of the most beautiful thoughts I ever had.

We slept in a cabin that night not far from the rim of the canyon. I had mentioned that we should get up early and see the sunrise, but they said, "If you've seen one circus, you've seen them all, and that goes for canyons, too." So they voted to stay in the sack.

I dressed and slipped out before daylight. I found a place where I could climb down and sit on a ledge and have an orchestra seat for the grandest show on earth.

The sun broke over the far horizon and made long purple and cobalt shadows far below. The eagles greeted the morning with their shrill screams, and sailed on frozen wings in ever broader circles. The canyon slowly opened its eyes and came to life. Again I had that holy feeling, and realized that I was just a speck on a speck in this universe.

What mattered Smackover, Whizbang, Dalhart, Mangum, Wink, Mexia, Kilgore, Ragtown? What mattered Newkirk, Oklahoma, where I used to sit on our front stoop and watch the Sunday evening promenade of finely groomed horses, pulling shiny buggies full of people in their Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes. They would come down Main Street, all in single file, turn at our corner, and go back up the street, greeting each other as they passed for the fifth or sixth time. I dreamed that some day I'd have a fine buggy and join that Sunday parade.

I also remembered, when I was a small boy in St. Louis, that I would awaken before daylight and hear the horses' hooves — clop, clop, clop, on the cobblestones. I wondered where they were going. They'd go a few clops, then stop — a few more clops, then stop. I suppose they were pulling a milk wagon, but then I imagined a knight carrying a long spear.

My dreaming was over when I heard someone say, "There's a guy way down there!" I climbed up and went back to the cabin.

"How was the sunrise?" the fellows asked.

"Oh, so-so. When you've seen one sunrise, you've seen 'em all," I answered.

We went back to Highway 66 and headed for Needles. We crossed the Colorado River below Needles, and decided to take a swim. The old car we were riding in had no top, so the Arizona sun on top of your head all day would bake your skull.

We went below the bridge, peeled off, and dived into the muddy water. The Hoover Dam hadn't been built yet, and the water was red, thick mud. I once heard a tour guide at the canyon tell a crowd, "A fish in the Colorado river swims backward to keep the mud out of its eyes."

After our swim, we headed north to Las Vegas. It wasn't much of a town then. A small street of business houses, three or four gambling houses, and that was it. The strip hadn't been thought of yet. We rented a cabin and stayed several days. Over all of the cabins they had built a big framework, like an arbor. over the frame, they had stretched yards and yards of burlap to break the sun's rays. Coolers were still a few years away.

We played the "one-armed bandits" and lost — so, on to Reno. We arrived after dark and rented a cabin with two beds — three in one bed, and two in the other. We had just gotten in bed when we heard a roaring noise.

"What's that?" someone asked. "It sounds like a train coming!"

It came closer and closer, and someone yelled, "My God! It's going to hit this cabin!" We all jumped out of bed and formed a tight

huddle between the beds. We had our arms around each other — we didn't know which way to run.

Then it hit! The floor shook — the walls shook — we shook! I have never before been surrounded by such a crushing noise. We were frozen in our tracks. Then the frightful noise passed and gradually faded into the distance.

Ben got our flashlight and looked out the back window. "No wonder," he said. "We're not three feet from the railroad track."

If you ever bed down after dark, be sure you know where the railroad is. That will scare you out of ten year's growth.

The boys went on to California. I stayed in Reno, because I was to meet my Dad there in a few days. He had recently sold out in Kilgore, Texas, and was on the lookout for a new location.

I had nothing to do, and not much money to do it. Reno wasn't much of a city then. They had a sign up across the street saying it was the biggest little city on earth, but it wasn't really a city — it was a big, little town.

I hung out at Harold's and the other gambling places watching all those silver dollars clinking around. The first evening I bought a magazine and went to the YMCA to find a bed. All they had were about thirty cots on an upstairs, screened porch, backed up to the Truckee River. I rented one for fifty cents and went to bed. It wasn't dark yet, and I was the first person on the porch. So I showered, propped up on my cot, and started reading.

Then men started coming up fast. Soon all the beds were full. It still wasn't dark, and I thought this sure was an early-to-bed town.

The porch was long, and the cots were placed side by side, with the head against the wall and the foot toward the Truckee. There was just barely room to walk past the foot of the beds. They were all numbered, and the desk man gave you a numbered card when you rented your cot.

Soon, other men started coming up. They'd go to a cot and tell the guy to get up. "I'm number six — you've got my bed!"

"Someone had my bed, so I crawled into this one." Then he'd get up and tell the guy in number five to vacate.

"Like hell, I will! said Number Five. "This is my bed!" That's when the fist fight started. This same act was taking place all up and down the line. Soon there were knock down and drag-outs taking place all over the porch. I had a ringside seat. This was better than vaudeville.

I never did know whether men were slipping in and grabbing a bed, or if the desk clerk was selling more cots than he had. At any rate, I always got there early, propped up on my pillow so I could see

good — with my cot number in my hand. They fought every night for the five nights I stayed there. Nobody ever came up to stop it, so sometimes it went on until the wee hours. It was worth the trip.

Dad came, and we palled around for a few days. Once we were coming out of a gambling house, and I ran nose to nose against Jack Dempsey.

He grabbed me with both hands and apologized in his “small” voice, “I’m so sorry. Pardon me, please.”

“Sure thing, Mr. Dempsey.”

When he had gone, Dad said, “Why didn’t you give him the old one-two in his breadbasket?”

“No, thanks! I kinda enjoyed rubbing noses with him.”

Dad and I went on to Los Angeles, felt a couple of earthquake shocks, and started back to Texas.

He had taken up with the ugliest cat I ever saw. He had adopted the thing in Kilgore and named it Dugas. It rode in the back seat, and was suffering from the heat, so we dampened some towels for it to lie on. We stopped for gas at a little desert station, and Dugas jumped out and ran under the man’s house. We called and coaxed for an hour, but Dugas didn’t want any more of that hot car. The station man promised he’d feed it. “It gets plenty lonesome around here anyway, so it’ll be loved,” he said.



Back in Texas, I got a job in the car barn of the railroad shops. I was assigned to a man as his helper. We worked mostly on boxcars, replacing worn boards and lining cars with heavy paper to hold wheat.

Then one day we had to work on some wheels (trucks). We had to cut a steel band, so the fellow told me to hold a big, long chisel and he'd hit it with a sledgehammer.

I held it on the spot we were to cut, and that guy swung the hammer back to his heels, then came overhead and down on the chisel.

I vibrated all over. I turned loose with my right hand and grasped the chisel with my left.

"Hold it with your right hand. You can hold it steadier."

"Bull corn," I answered. "I'm not taking a chance on you missing and murdering my right hand. I'm planning on making my living with that one."

"Then I'm not going to swing with you shaking the chisel around with that left hand. If I missed, I'd probably jerk something loose in my back."

I quit that night.

I needed some money. You can't buy a girl a Coke and hamburger with wishes.

One day I saw an ad in a pulp magazine. It said if you wanted to know a sure way to make money without working, send one dollar to Detroit, Box number so and so.

I rushed in my dollar. In about ten days, I received a form letter:

"If you want to make money without working, advertise like I do in pulp magazines. Some fool will send you a buck.

Have a happy summer,

Signed: I. M. Smart"

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When I graduated from high school, I didn't send out any invitations. I knew most people would feel duty bound to send me a gift, and I couldn't ask friends to give me a present just because I did something for my own good.

I received only one gift. It was a framed invitation to my graduation that someone else had sent them.

As soon as I could kiss all the girls who would kiss me goodbye, I shoved off for Chicago and art school.

I paid my tuition for the summer course and asked the lady if she knew anyone I might split the rent with. She introduced me to another student from Texas, Buford Tune, who later was to draw the feature, "Dottie Dripple." Tune and I found a room on the near north side, and each moved in his one suitcase.

Our first few days in school were spent in learning to do perspective. Then one day our instructor told us to draw our own idea of a mountain scene with a setting sun. We all did our best, but one student had the sun setting on this side of the mountains. The instructor sadly shook his head and said, "What else could you expect from a bunch of would-be cartoonists?"

Then one day a student walked down the hall to the bathroom. He never made it as far as the bathroom, however, but came rushing back to tell us that another class was sketching a nude model. In the next five minutes, every guy and girl in the class had to go to the bathroom. I had to go about six times, and when I passed by the open door, and could see that naked chick, I always had to tie my shoelace — or try some other stall.

Our instructor didn't say anything, but pretended to be shuffling some papers. I'm sure he saw the same reaction from every new class. After awhile he said, "Let's all settle down now, and do your work. Tomorrow you will have your first "Life Class." The rest of the day was a drag. I thought tomorrow would never come.

The next morning there were no stragglers — everyone was on time. We purchased charcoal and a charcoal pad, and hurried to the Life Class room. They had seats on what looked to be small

saw-horses with an upright on the end to rest your drawing board on. These were arranged in a semi-circle in front of a platform — with a high stool for the model.

All of the eager beavers went for the front seats. As for me, I got a front seat in dead center.

We placed our pads on our drawing boards, took charcoal in hand, and kept our eyes glued on the little screen over in one corner where the model was undressing.

We were all panting like a steam engine stalled on a hill — when out walked a big-muscled man wearing a red jockey strap. Good God! Was this what I'd paid my good money for? I could have done this any day in the week in our football locker room.

I drew the bastard sitting on a barb-wire fence, which I don't think the instructor cared for. I noticed that all of the girls drew a nice picture of the big stud. I suppose it's all in your point of view.

We sketched the big ox for a week, but the next week, we hit the jackpot. She was a natural blonde, too; you could tell. I'd always heard that the only way you could tell if a girl was a natural blonde was to see her in a bathtub, but there wasn't any doubt — our model was a blonde.

About every twenty minutes, there would be a break to let the model relax from a pose. She'd come around to look at our sketches of her. I liked that. She'd stand right against your shoulder and look. Boy! What a set of knockers she had. If you turned your head real quick, they'd poke your eye out. She smelled good, too, just like a field of Texas bluebonnets. I think I enjoyed her looking at my sketch more than I did making the drawing.

She sure wouldn't date any of the students. We knew that for a fact. Every man in the class tried it, not once, but almost every day.

We had several different models after that, and some peachy keen "true" brunettes, but none ever had the same effect on us as did our original blonde.

Buford Tune found a better place to live. Several boys split the rent, so he moved, and I got a new pardner by the name of Jerry Bosch. Jerry was a big man, and had played football in Kentucky. He told me he was a tackle, so one night I asked him to show me how he got down on the line. He took his stance, and I yelled "Charge!" He did, hit the wall, and broke his thumb. We didn't play football any more.

One night we were both working on a drawing for the class next day. Jerry asked me, "Boody, did you ever pull your toenails off?"

"Sure. I once stubbed one off my big toe."

"I don't mean stubbed. I mean pull 'em off with your fingers?"

"Certainly not. Have you?"

"Sure. It really don't hurt much."

"Let's see you pull one off," I said.

So he took off his shoe and sock, fingered around until he got a good hold on his little toenail — then gave a quick jerk, and off came his toenail. It bled a drop or two, but not much.

"See, it didn't hurt — let's see you do it."

"I'll take your word for it. I'd rather just trim mine."

Chicago gets hot in the summer, and it's an iceberg in the winter. To get home, I walked on Michigan Boulevard and crossed the bridge over the Chicago river. Believe me, with that wind blowing off the lake, you could tell exactly where your underwear came down to.

It was summer now, however, and on hot nights several of us would go to a small park nearby. They allowed free speech there, and always there were men up on their soap boxes. We'd lie around on the cool grass and listen to the speakers. Some were religious — some were trying to straighten the world out, and some were just yapping to hear their own voices.

One night a fellow placed his box down, stepped up, and began to strum a tune on his ukulele. We joined a small crowd that gathered in front of his box. Then he began to preach. "Folks," he said. "God is everywhere. He's in the grass — he's in the trees — he's in those light globes over there — he's in ——"

"He's not in the light globes," said one of his listeners.

"Yes, Brother, he's in the light globes, he's in the grass ——"

"He may be in the grass, but he's not in the light globes," repeated the listener.

The preacher turned blue in the face. I thought he was going to have a stroke. "I say he's in the light globes!"

"And I say he's not!"

The preacher held his ukulele above his head, then crashed it down on the heckler's head. The uke burst into a hundred splinters.

"You ignorant bastard," shouted the preacher. "When I say he's in the goddamned light globes, you'd better believe it!"

Jerry took a shine to an Egyptian girl who was also an art student. He had a date for Saturday night and wondered if I'd like a blind date with his girl's friend.

"Why not? Saturday only comes once a week. Let's live it up."

We met them at the original Water Works Monument on Michigan Boulevard — the water works that couldn't put the fire out started by Mrs. O'Leary's kicking cow.

My date was a cute little redhead. When we danced together, I could rest my head on top of her red head — that is, if I stooped over a little.

We took them to a dance hall called "Dill Pickles." You went down Tuckers' Alley until you came to a door about 18 inches high. Over it was a sign: "All who enter here leave their dignity behind." We all got down and crawled in. The first room was about 12x30, with a few slender tables around the sides. From there you entered the ballroom. It was about twice the size of the first room. At one end sat a five piece dance band, and they could pour out the New Orleans jazz.

You could get set-ups at the slim tables, and Bosch and I had silverplated hip flasks which were very fashionable at the time. We poured a little of Capone's juice on the rocks, toasted all lovers, and went in to dance.

You couldn't really dance — too many people in too small a space. All you could do was wriggle around and rub your partner. I always tried to back up to some girl and get rubbed front and back. Later when I heard the Doublemint gum song, I always thought of the "Dill Pickles."

"Double your pleasure, double your fun — double rub, double rub, right on your old bun!"

After awhile they called a break. I guess to give the trombone player a chance to catch his breath. For some unexplained reason, everyone tried to squeeze into the little room. Luckily, we were near the door and were pushed up to our table where our bucket of ice and glasses were waiting.

The room was jammed — solid people from wall to wall. It was so crowded in the little room that we lifted the girls up on the table, then we crawled up by their warm sides.

About then, some fellow must have rubbed a girl the wrong way — so she batted him in the teeth. He batted her right back, and the fight spread out from them like a ripple in a fish pond. The entire room was swaying and swinging. They were pounding anybody around them.

We were on the table and out of the fight. We were neutral, so we were cheering for everybody.

A flaming red-haired young man was in the center of the crush. I think he was the guy who inspired the creator of "Howdy Doody," or maybe he was Howdy's father. Anyhow, his bright red hair caught our eyes, so we began to cheer for "Red." He smiled at us just as someone smacked him in the eye. "Red" disappeared down into the mauling mob. In a minute his head popped up at another point. He must have crawled between all those legs. He waved at us, then got a crunching blow on his nose. Poor "Red" sank out of sight again, but in just a moment he came up for air at another spot. His nose was bleeding, but he was still smiling and looking at us. I think he was really enjoying the game, so we yelled encouragement — "Atta boy, Red. Go get 'em."

Smack! Pow! "Red" went under again. The last time I saw "Red", his nose was bleeding like a fountain, and both eyes were swollen shut. But old "Red" was still smiling. Before he could go under again, the police came.

Tucker's Alley was full of paddy wagons. We were pushed in 'em and I got my only free ride through the Loop.

The Judge said, "Guilty or not guilty, that'll be ten dollars. Pay at the desk on your way out." I never saw my little redheaded girl after that. I suppose she thought my idea of an evening was a little much.

For the life of me I can't remember why, but Bosch and I went different ways, and I moved in with three other art students.

We had some bang-up parties. I remember one we were throwing, and I invited Bosch and his girl to drop by. They got there late, and coming in to our apartment, you had to walk down a hall, and past the bathroom.

When Jerry and his date started down the hall, they got as far as the bathroom. Two girls had passed out, and we had placed them in the bathtub so they wouldn't get stepped on. Jerry's date thought the girls were dead, so she dragged him away before the police came. She didn't want another paddy wagon ride.

I lived there until Christmas. We had a great time. There was an Al Capone one-room bootleg joint over our apartment. We knew the man who ran it, so when we needed a bottle, we tapped on the ceiling with a broom handle. Once was for a pint, twice was a quart, three times meant for him to come join the party. He got more three

taps than anything else, because when he joined us he always brought along a bottle.

A fellow at school had gone to the University of Arizona, and he did a great selling job for his old Alma Mater. I received their catalog and planned to go there after New Year's.

A young man who lived in an upstairs apartment picked this time to do himself in. He crawled in his bathtub and blew his brains out.

I had met him several times at our mail boxes, and he was always very friendly, and dressed very neat. I suppose he got in the bathtub so he wouldn't mess up the place.

The police came and questioned everyone in the house. They finally concluded it was suicide. His brother came and made all the arrangements. He hired some nitwit to give the eulogy at the young fellow's services.

Almost all the people in the house went. There didn't seem to be too many people who knew him. I thought everything went off fine until the guy got up to give the eulogy.

He talked and talked and finally ended up with, "Bruce was a kind man. He never made many friends, he never held a job long, but you must give credit where credit is due — Bruce was a good shot!"

I went home for the holidays. Dad was in business at Pampa, Texas. I borrowed my Dad's auto and drove to Childress to see my old flames. I also recruited Fred Merritt to try Arizona University with me. He was an excellent second baseman, and I had heard that Arizona went in for baseball in a big way.

Christmas came and New Year's went, and Fred and I left for Tucson. We did one thing that I've never done before or since — we both bought cowboy hats. Now a cowboy I'm not or ever was. In fact, I'd have to look very closely to tell whether a cow was coming or going. I guess we wanted to let the Arizona girls know we were from BIG TEXAS.

The first night in Tucson, we stayed in a hotel. Early next day, we went to the University. It was beautiful — just like the ex-student in Chicago had described it. There were palm trees, pepper trees, fruit trees, and bushels and bushels of green grass. There was plenty of open campus, not crowded with buildings like it is today. There were less than two thousand students then, so at least you had a nodding acquaintance with all the kids. Everyone knew Fred, but I don't believe he learned anyone's name. We'd be walking to class

and pass someone, and they'd speak. "Good morning, Fred." Fred would wave and mumble, "Good morning, Ug-glong!" The next person he would say, "Howdy, Blug—nug."

I asked, "What th' hell did you call that boy?"

"I didn't call him anything. I don't know his name, so I just mumble something. They're thinking about their next class, and don't know from nothin'!"

Our first morning, I asked someone where we might find the coach. "Go to the gym. Pop McCale has an office there."

"Thanks!" We went to the gym and found his office. We knocked and were bidden to enter. We introduced ourselves and told the coach that I played football, and Fred was a crackerjack baseball player. "Can you help us in any way?"

"About all I can do now," answered the coach, "is to fix you up with a room."

"That'll help."

So he took us to Cochise Hall and put us in a large basement room. There were two single beds, a study table, and several chairs. There was still room to set up a tennis court. We never had much use for the study table, as our room turned out to be a gathering place. It would fill up each night, and the bull would get hip deep.

I was made Art Editor of the University magazine, "The Kitty Kat." I was also going out for spring training in football, so was soon known around campus.

I was in the first art class the University had. There were about a dozen students, and one lady professor. I'm sure it was her first job after graduating. She knew even less about art than I did, and I knew less than nothing. Another boy was in the class by the name of Jean Provence. I didn't think we were any trouble, but I guess our antics were bugging the professor, and Jean learned that she was on the verge of kicking us out of the class. I guess she figured she could stand anything for four more months, so let sleeping dogs lie.

Our model was always some girl with clothes on — yecch! But out under the desert moon, everything came together. You couldn't grow much except cactus, but love was a night bloomer. The rattlesnakes rattled, the owls asked whoooo, the kangaroo rats jumped, but nothing disturbed us Valentinos.

The main thing you had to watch out for were scorpions. If you lay down on one of those rascals, you would jump out of your pants — if you had any on.

Summer came. Fred and I couldn't tear ourselves away from this Shangri-la. A druggist hired us to put him in a soda fountain — so we stocked it and were ready for business. It was a nice job. We had

many girls customers. They looked so fresh and cool in their pretty, freshly ironed dresses. We had a code to order drinks. For instance, if you called "72," that was a glass of water. If you called "79," that meant a LEG SHOW IN THE PARLOR! All the clerks would stop what they were doing, and strain their eyeballs.

Again I got the urge to move along — I guess it was in my blood. It seemed I had been moving all my life. I had never lived in a real home. It had always been some rented room, or rooms, somewhere. By the time we got our pictures hung, we were off to some place else. My Dad was the same way.

He had left home when he was nineteen. He rode a bicycle from Wichita Falls, Texas to New Mexico, where he tended bar. New Mexico wasn't a state yet, and it was wilder than a barrel of snakes. He also helped build a fence around Yellowstone Park. He worked in the Homestake gold mine at Lead, up the mountain from Deadwood, South Dakota. His father had taken a ship from New Orleans, and sailed to the Isthmus of Panama. There he backpacked across the Pacific, and took another ship to San Francisco. That was in 1849.

Grandpa didn't find much gold though, so he rode a horse back to Texas. There he married Grandma.

His main occupation was farming, but he moonlighted as an Indian fighter. Grandma told me that she sat up many nights in their cabin with a rifle across her lap, almost afraid to breathe, listening for Indians. She would be alone with a cabin full of babies, while Grandpa would be off gadding about chasing Indians!

She lived to be 102 years old, and drew a state pension for life, because Grandpa helped rid Texas of the Redskins. Grandma had twelve children, so she spent her later years going from one to the other.

I always liked it when she visited us. She would read me the wildest tales from her Bible. Those old boys in the Bible kinda whooped it up, too.

I guess moving came naturally. It seems I'm always "homeless bound" for some new place.

I got on the highway and thumbed my way to Venice, California. My old pal, Curtis Coley, was working at an Owl Drug Store just off the entrance to the amusement pier.

I worked with him a few days, and got my eats. His wife ran the loges at a dance hall on the pier. She would slip us in, and we could dance free. There was always a flock of chicks hanging around.

I got a job as a shill for the pier. When business got dull at any of the concessions, I would be signalled in. I would throw at the dolls, toss the rings, ride the rides, or whatever.

I would whoop it up on the rides, hoping the people would think it was great fun and come join me. I always won at the gaming stands — then slipped the prize back under the canvas flap at the rear. After I rode a Ferris Wheel twenty times a day, and yelled and laughed myself silly, it got to be a damned job, and no fun.

After six weeks, I packed my bag, shook hands with Coley, and told him I really enjoyed his hospitality.

I thumbed down the coast to San Diego, then caught a ride with an old fellow driving a coupe. It was getting dark, and the farther we got into the mountains, the more nervous he became.

“You know,” he said, “There have been a lot of holdups lately, but I’ve worked out a plan with my wife. She knows exactly when I’m leaving San Diego, and if I’m not home within ten minutes of when I’m supposed to be, she notifies the police, and they set up road blocks. A man wouldn’t have a chance of getting away.”

I thought to myself, you crazy old bastard, suppose you had a flat. Then what would the cops do. They’d be pretty burned up after you pulled that a couple of times.

He kept talking about my chances of survival. “They’d shoot a guy like a dog if they saw him in my car.”

I saw a motel (cabins), so I told him to let me out as I thought I’d shack up for the night. He burned fifty cents worth of rubber stopping the car.

I went into the office. A young man and his wife were there, and over in one corner was a little soda fountain.

“How about a chocolate milkshake,” I said.

“Do you know how to make it?” asked the man.

“Yes, don’t you?”

“No, but my wife likes them. If you’ll make her one, you can have one free.”

We all had the thickest milkshakes I could make. Then they told me why they were working at the motel.

“We’re from Old Saybrook, Connecticut. We heard so much about California that we thought we could make a living out here by just picking up loose change around parking meters. We couldn’t even find a decent job — so as soon as we can save enough from this job, we’re going home.”

He ran the motel at night, and his wife cleaned the cabins. He broke out a bottle of Virginia Dare wine from stock, and we sat on a bench out front and drank it.

“If you want to stay all night, you can sleep in one of the cabins. My wife can clean it up in the morning, and the boss will never know the diff.”

He didn't have to twist my arm. I left early the next morning for Monahans, Texas, where my Dad had put in a cafe while I was in Tucson.

Of course I borrowed the car from Dad and took off for Childress. Driving on the great plains I saw the most beautiful mirages I had ever seen. It was hot, and that made them all the more vivid. They looked like they were a half mile from the highway. You could see the reflections of the cows, trees, and houses in the "water." They looked so real that you'd never guess they were caused from heat waves.

It reminded me of the two men who came from back east. They were driving near Amarillo, and saw a large lake. "Look at that," said the first man. "Imagine all that water out here on these flat plains."

"And look how blue it is. It's as blue as the sky," said number two.

As they drove along they saw more lakes. This is really a land of lakes, they thought. When they stopped for gas, they asked the station man about it.

"Oh," said the Texan, "Them ain't lakes — them's jest mirages. It's th' damn heat rays comin' up from th' ground or somewhere, and makes yuh think yer seein' water. Yuh never can git close t' them — they disappears."

Soon after they left the station, they saw the largest and most beautiful mirage of them all.

"Let's see how close we can get before it fades out."

They started across the smooth prairie. "Pour it on," said number one, "We're gaining on it."

"By Jesus, it'd better disappear or we've caught it."

They did catch it. They ran their car off into thirty feet of water.

At Childress I saw most of the old gang. They organized a picnic and about ten couples went out to Dead Man's Cave, located on the Buckle L Ranch.

There are a number of caves scattered around within a quarter of a mile, but Dead Man's was in the center, facing a creek, and was ideal for a picnic.

Dead Man's got its name because a man's skeleton was found in there. He probably got bitten by a rattlesnake, and crawled in the cave to get out of the sun. That whole section was lousy with rattlers. There was an old saying that cowboys always put a hair rope around

their bedroll to keep the rattlers from getting in bed with them. So us kids always carried along a hair rope whenever we went camping.

One day we spotted a big one, and we thought we'd corral him by putting the hair rope in a circle. He went over it like his belly was greased with butter. We got the rope and circled it about him again. He didn't even slow down — over and out. We coiled the rope and threw it in the car. If a snake wanted in our sacks, he would just have to take his chances.

Back to the picnic — we ate all the fried chicken, cold biscuits, hard-boiled eggs, potato chips, and sliced yellow-meated water-melons. Then went down to the creek and washed the chicken-licken' grease off our hands, and the watermelon seeds out of our ears.

Johnny was quite an athlete. He could jump, flat-footed, higher than a jackrabbit. He could stand next to a table or counter, and without touching with his hands, jump up on the thing. He really had springs instead of legs.

Dead Man's Cave was in the side of a cliff. Johnny looked it over, and decided he could scale the cliff, which was almost vertical for about thirty feet. A few bucks were bet that he couldn't climb to the top, so Johnny went down into the rocky creek bottom and started up.

We all sat back in a shady place, nippin' some home brew beer, and yelling encouragement to the mountain climber. Johnny finally got both hands on the top of the ledge, and slowly pulled himself up. When he got his head above the rim, a coiled rattlesnake was looking him right in the eye, not six inches away. He came down a little faster than he went up. He threw himself away from the cliff, and did a perfect backflip before he hit the rocky creek. He broke both ankles.

I didn't witness this next short short, but I got it from very reliable sources. A group of boys got a tin washtub of ice to cool their home brew, and drove out to Ross' pasture to play penny ante.

Bingo Elkins was one of the group. Now, if you ever thought of Bingo you'd think of neatness and cleanliness. When we were going to school, nobody ever said "ring around the collar" to Bingo. He cleaned his nails as often as he combed his hair. He changed shirts morning and noon, and when he came to town in the evening, he had on another fresh one. His shoes were always shined. He was just hospital sterile all the time — but for all of this Bingo had one weakness — he stuttered.

The poker game moved along, and empty home brew bottles were stacking up. During the excitement of a big pot (about 60 cents), no one noticed that Bingo had wandered away.

When the pot was won, the cards re-shuffled, and the new ante was put up, someone said, "Hey, where's old Elkins?"

To stretch their cramped legs, they all got up and started looking for Bingo. "He was pretty drunk — he might have passed out."

Bingo loved to harmonize, but he never quite finished with the others. So off in the distance, they heard — "The stars at n-n-night, are b-b-big and b-b-bright — deep in the heart of T-T-Texas——!"

They went toward the singing and found Bingo sitting out flat with his britches down. He had a big frog, and was rubbing it all over his penis. "What on earth are you doing, Bingo?"

"W-W-What's it l-l-look like I'm d-d-doing? I'm gonna make w-w-warts all over my li'l d-d-dickey, then I'm gonna g-g-give th' g-g-girls a hell of a g-g-good t-t-time!"

I went back to Monahans and took it easy for a few days. I met an old friend, Don Tudor, whom I had known in Ranger and later played football against in Matador. When Don got out of high school, he burned the breeze to Washington, D. C.

"Go back with me, Boody. Washington is a great place."

"What would I do there?"

"Work for the government like I do."

"I don't know anything about that kind of work."

"You don't have to know anything. You just get a job in some department, be real quiet, and they forget you're there. Keep busy working crossword puzzles."

"No thanks. I want to be a cartoonist."

Fourteen years later I saw Don again. I was in Washington on business, and I phoned him. He had a string of taxicabs, and taxied me all over the city sightseeing. He was married and had four children. For just working crossword puzzles, he had done all right.

I returned to Arizona and went to school until Christmas — then the old homeless bound bug bit me again. I had to go.

20

Back in Chicago I teamed up with Sig Hilker, another budding cartoonist. We rented one room and bath in a basement. You could either enter by the door or through the basement window. We usually had visitors enter by the window, and then they really knew they were slumming. We asked the landlord if we could decorate the wall. He said to go ahead, so we covered it with a mural of a man chasing a bunch of girls — in full color.

I passed by the old home several years later, and they had torn the building down. There, out in the open, in the broad daylight, was that guy still chasing those broads.

Sig had been expelled from Texas U for a cartoon he published in “The Longhorn.” His ambition was to lay three special women: one with a wooden leg, a Salvation Army girl, and a nun. He claimed he had gotten the first two, but was still looking for the nun.

He was the horniest fellow I ever knew. He was freak happy. If he saw a woman with a gimpy walk, or a hunchback, he would turn every stone to meet them. He just wanted girls who were different from the norm.

However, he wouldn’t yawn and turn his back on any girl. One day he was looking in a shop window on Madison, and a girl with school books under her arm stopped at the same window.

She pointed to something in the window and asked him if he didn’t think it looked tacky. “Well, now that you mention it,” he answered, “Where do you go to school?”

She told him, but said her mother was out of town, and she was playing hookey.

“Where’s your father?”

“Lordy, I haven’t seen him in years. He and mother are divorced. Say, would you like to come up to our rooms and drink a Coke?”

Sig would like that very much. They went to her place, had a Coke, and after a little sweet talk, he got her to bed.

Much later, Sig tidied up his hair, buttoned his coat, and was

ready to shake hands and say adeiux. "That'll cost you twenty bucks," she said.

"Don't be sill," he said. "A pro gets two dollars, and you're only a——." He never finished. She opened a door, and he saw four of the toughest looking punks he had ever seen. They were playing cards, and all turned when she opened the door.

"Everything okay, Bess?"

She turned to Sig and asked, "Is everything okay?"

"Everything is copacetic, and how!" he said.

She closed the door, he paid off, and got the hell out of there.

I wouldn't say Sig was nutty, but wanting to be a cartoonist didn't speak too well along that line. Being nutty wasn't necessarily a prerequisite for being a cartoonist, but it surely helped.

One night Sig and I purchased a bottle of Al Capone's juice, and went to a little chop suey place on Clark Street. We had a private booth, ate a leisurely Chinese meal, and consumed most of our firewater.

On our way home, we had to pass down a fairly dark block. About halfway, Sig said, "Hold it, Boody. I have a strong feeling of a back flip inside me, and it's trying to get out."

"Never try to hold a flip inside you. It may split your spleen—turn it loose." I had no sooner said it when he tried. He almost made it, but not quite. He hit "kersplat" on the sidewalk — flat of his back. I thought the guy had killed himself, at least busted his skull. I was down beside him, and several people across the street started applauding.

"Don't be clapping. Help me," I called. "This guy has knocked himself cuckoo."

Three girls came over. They had been sitting on their stoop trying to keep cool. They were still laughing.

"That was the funniest thing I ever saw a man do," said one girl. "What got into him to try a stunt like that on cement?"

"He said it was a flip inside him," I said, "but I think those Chinese noodles went to his head. He's groaning. Help me get him home."

I told them we only lived a couple of blocks, so the girls helped get him to his feet, and steadied him on either side. We walked poor Sig home. I noticed he was able to get his arms around both girls. He wasn't completely balmy.

When we got to our dugout, Sig told them to put him through the window. It was a short cut to the bed. It was — in fact, the bed

was under the window. One girl went through first, the other two pushed Sig in. The poor guy was so weak, he could hardly help. He put his arms around the girl inside, and when he was almost through the window, he gave a lunge and pinned the girl beneath him. "I've gotcha," he said. "You're all mine!"

"Let me up, you bastard — you've been playing possum!" We all crawled in and turned on the light. The girls laughed at our mural and our silly light. We had an electric globe and a gas mantle coming out of the same fixture. Only the globe worked.

I broke out what was left of the bottle and poured everyone a drink. Two of the girls were students taking a decorating course. The other worked at "The Sweet Shop," a cafeteria upstairs at the corner of State and Lake.

"They're looking for someone to pick up dirty dishes," she said. "They give students their lunch and dinner for two hours work, and 50c per hour for any extra."

"The 'Sweet Shop' sounds sweet to me. I'll talk to them tomorrow."

The other two girls said they should bring their instructor to see our place. "He could make a career out of trying to decorate your dump."

They were all nice girls, and we got to be good friends, especially since they came over every Saturday and helped us sterilize the joint.

One afternoon Sig and I were wondering how we'd spend our first million, when a gentle tap sounded on our door. We opened it to a nice-looking lady and a beautiful daughter whom I judged to be about eighteen.

"Are you the young men who go to art school?" she asked.

"Yes, Ma'am."

"I'd like to speak to you about my daughter, Elizabeth."

I invited them in. I was anxious to hear more about Elizabeth. She had raven black hair, and skin that looked like a new plucked peach. Make no mistake about it, she was stacked. She looked like a new brick crapper with a tin roof.

The lady sat on our one chair, Elizabeth sat on the edge of the bed, and Sig and I sat on two tomato crates we had salvaged. "Liz" sat up very prim and straight, and folded her hands in her lap, holding down her dress. I was hoping she'd cross her legs — but no soap.

"I'll come right to the point," said the mother. "Does your school use live models?"

“Yes, ma’am.” I thought to myself, if you’re looking for a job, baby, your soft and round had done went, but Elizabeth is something else.

She continued, “Do you think Elizabeth could get a job posing?”

“We’d sure speak to the manager, but I’m sure Elizabeth would stand a good chance.”

“How much do they pay?”

“I don’t really know,” I said. “But I imagine it’s about five an hour. It’s real easy work though, it’s mostly sitting down, and they have a break often so you can relax.”

I could tell this sounded pretty fine to Elizabeth. She was smiling at me.

“Would you boys teach Elizabeth how to pose, and maybe make some sketches of her?”

“Yes, ma’am! Do you mean right now?” I could see Sig licking his lips.

“Now would be fine,” said the mother.

“Then you sit on the bed so Elizabeth can sit in the chair. Elizabeth, you can take off your clothes in the bathroom.”

“You — you mean you want Baby to get — to get nude?”

“Yessum. She’s got to be naked so we can see each muscle, each curve. That’s the way we learn anatomy.”

Well, sir, Elizabeth’s eyes got bigger than a silver dollar, her mouth popped open like a supermarket door. It was so wide I could see all her fillings and down her throat all the way to her belly button.

Mama didn’t say a word. She grabbed Liz’s hand and out the door they went. Sig and I watched them from the window. They were walking almost in a run — like they were afraid we were going to sic the dog on them.

That ended the career of what I’d bet would have been a damn fine model.

Carey Orr and John T. McCutcheon were the two editorial cartoonists for the Chicago Tribune. They had two of the three offices on the top floor of the Tribune tower.

Mr. Orr had been one of our instructors the first summer I was at the Academy of Fine Arts, so I went up to see him quite often.

One day I asked him if it might be possible to get one of Mr. McCutcheon’s original cartoons. “I’ll call him and see if he’s free. He has some pretty big shots visiting him sometimes.” Mr. Orr phoned, and Mr. McCutcheon said, “Sure, send Rogers in.”

I knocked on his door, and he bade me enter. I walked into his office, and it was like going into a museum. He had been hunting in Africa, and had big game heads all around the walls — and in the center was a tabletop resting on mounted elephant legs. This was class, I thought. Then I looked at the visitor sitting at the table.

Holy Codfish! I had seen him in the newsreels and the newspapers many times. He had that big underslung pipe, too — it was the vice-president of the United States, Mr. Charles G. Dawes!

Mr. McCutcheon came from back of his large carved desk and shook hands with me just like I was a big shot.

“Mr. Rogers, shake hands with Vice-President Dawes.” Mr. Dawes unfolded out of the chair. I’m six feet one, and I had to look up to him. I shook hands and have no idea what I said — I didn’t know whether to call him Your Majesty, Your Holiness, or what. I was flabbergasted. I got out something, but God knows what it was. Both he and Mr. McCutcheon were gracious enough not to laugh.

Mr. McCutcheon selected one of his old drawings and autographed it for me. I beat a hasty retreat to Orr’s office.

“Why didn’t you tell me the Vice-President was in there?”

“The next time you go in, it might be Coolidge or Will Rogers.”

“Will Rogers I wouldn’t mind,” I said. “I may even be a half-assed cousin to him. We both came from the same neck of the woods.”

I told Orr about my being born in Hobart, Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). My Dad and Uncle Charley were partners in a little cafe there. The jailor took sick, and the Marshal asked Uncle Charley if he’d be the jailor for a few days. Uncle Charley obliged, and when he went to the jail, he found all the prisoners were his and Dad’s good customers. That night he opened the doors and let them all escape. He told the Marshal they must have got away while he dozed. Uncle Charley wasn’t asked to help out any more.

Years after the conversation with Mr. Orr, my wife Mary, Max Van Bibber (the man who draws “Winnie Winkle”), and I were passing through Hobart on our way back to New York.

I thought I should get officially born. In 1904 there was no courthouse, no county, no state, so no record of my birth existed. I had learned the doctor’s name who had launched me, so I asked at a drug store if he were still alive.

“Yes, he has an office upstairs,” the clerk said.

I went up and found the old doctor. He had the palsy so bad that he was shaking all over. I told him that I understood he was my Mother’s doctor when I was born. “If you were born here, then I had to be it! I was the only one here.”

He couldn't remember my Dad, but he remembered my Uncle Charley. "He's the fat rascal who let all the jail birds loose," he laughed. "Okay, I'll sign your certificate, but you'll have to have one more witness."

I asked him to give me the names of all the old-timers who were still alive. The old doctor shook all over the paper, but he finally wrote about 20 names.

Mary, Max and I started out. We found most of the people on the list. When I asked them the year they came to Hobart, they would say 1912, or something.

"Thanks, but you got here about eight years too late." Then we'd go to the next address. We started out at ten o'clock. By noon we had found all the "old-timers" on the list, but they weren't old enough.

We had lunch, and then I started walking around the square. When I saw an old man, I'd stop him and explain. He'd laugh and say, "Yuh can tell by lookin' at yuh thet yuh've been born!" Then he'd have to tell me about some old boy who was in the same fix, and go into all the details, — "and thet reminds me of another story —" he'd begin.

I'd say, "I'm sorry, but I've got to go to the can — hope you have a good crop," and I'd be off to the next old-timer.

Max and I worked out the square, then I drove around town — stopping any time I saw an old person. No luck. I was almost ready to throw in the towel when I saw an old man lying on a cot under a tree.

I went over, and the old man was sick. I explained my mission.

"Are you the kid that was born to Mabel and John Robers? Well, put 'er there, kid. I was living right next door to you!" He signed the deposition, and I became a legally branded, born, American citizen.

Sig took off for the Bluebonnet country, and I moved in with Zack Mosley and Frank Engli. Zack was later to create "Smilin' Jack," and Engli worked with Milton Caniff on "Terry and the Pirates" and "Steve Canyon" from the very beginning.

We worked on our assignments into the wee hours. Sometimes we would go down to a Thompson's Cafe that was two blocks north of the Wrigley Building and have a cup of coffee and a sweet roll.

It was about 2 a. m. and we were the only customers, when in walked two men. Both wore dark overcoats and derby hats. One was a big, tall, young man — the other a little old guy. The young man didn't say a word, but the old guy started right in to give the counter man hell. He kept on and on, and was getting pretty rough. Finally

the counter man could stand no more of it and said, "look, old fellow, if you weren't so dried up, I'd knock you on your ass, but I won't hit an old man! So shut your mouth!"

The old fellow growled, "If you want a fight, Mac, you can have it. My friend here does all my fighting." He pointed to his big friend who nodded his head "yes."

"Then you've got it," said the cafe man, and he came around the dish-up counter, rolling up his apron.

The three of them went out the door into the side street off of Michigan. We all followed to watch. The cafe man and the big guy squared off, circled each other a couple of times, then crashed together. The Thompson's man went straight for the big man's right eye — and gouged it out. The big fellow bit the counter man's ear off. That was all of the fight. The big fellow clapped a hand over his eye socket, and he and the old dude ran down the dark street and disappeared.

The cafe man was bleeding buckets full. I never saw so much blood coming from a man's face. He held his apron where his ear used to be, and said, "Boys, help me find my ear — and if you see that bastard's eye, squash it like a grape." We found neither the eye nor the ear. I guess the guy ran off with it still in his mouth.

We went back to our place without finishing our sweet rolls. None of us felt too hungry.

The phone rang. It was Mr. Orr. "Boody," he said, "I have a fifty dollar job for you if you want it. An insurance man called me to see if I'd made a drawing that they could send to their customers. I told him I couldn't do it, but I had a young man who could. Do you want the job?"

Did I! I rushed to the firm's offices and got the details. The man wanted a caricature of himself handing a policy to a man and lady — and looking through a window was Mr. Death, Mr. Flood, and Mr. Fire saying "Curses!"

He gave me a big photo of himself, and told me to leave out some of the wrinkles.

I went home and sweated blood over that drawing. I did two and threw them in the trash. I wanted my first professional job to be as perfect as I could possibly make it. I discarded the third, but the fourth looked pretty good. I was just ready to put my signature on it when the phone rang. Mr. Orr asked, "Boody, have you finished that drawing yet?"

"Just finishing up," I said.

"Well, you needn't," said Orr. "The man just had a heart attack and died."

Saturday night, about midnight, Zack said, "I think I'll go to church in the morning. Anyone care to go with me?"

There were no takers, so we got ready for bed. Frank Engli was washing his teeth, and called from the bathroom, "Did you people know it's damn near impossible to wash your teeth without moving your hand?"

"Of course it is." I said. "What brought that idea on?"

"Because I just did it," said Frank. "All you have to do is hold your toothbrush still and shake your head!"

"For the love of Pete — wash out your mouth and come to bed." I heard him spit the water out of his mouth. Then he said, "Goodnight, Boody — goodnight, Zack."

"Goodnight, Zack. Goodnight, Frank."

"Goodnight, Frank. Goodnight, Bood."

I said, "When I count to three, let's all together say "Goodnight — one — two —."

"For Christ's sake, let's go to sleep," said Zack. "Goodnight all!"

"Goodnight!" said Frank and I.

I lay there eyeballing the ceiling. These kids were fun, I thought. This is just about the best home I ever had. It wouldn't last, though. We'd all go our separate ways. Maybe I should go to church with Zack. The roof wouldn't fall in, and it might do me some good.

"Zack," I called, "I think I will go to church with you."

"Why th' hell couldn't you wait until morning to tell me? I had just got off to sleep!"

It was late when we got up. We barely had time to shave and dress. We rushed to a little church on Michigan Boulevard. The services were just starting, and the church was almost full. The usher seated Zack, and took me down nearer the front. He seated me next to a real pretty girl. She had to move her dress over a little so I could squeeze in.

"Sorry," I whispered. She just smiled — didn't answer.

The singing ended and the pastor said, "Let us pray." I bowed my head and then I heard it for the first time: BRAALLRRUMBLEEEEGROWL!

Holy Moses, I thought. Is that me or this pretty gal?

RUMMBBLEBUMBLESKREEEE! Then it really got going. I sounded like my big guts were eating up my little guts. I'm sure it could be heard all over the church. I could feel the girl trying to move farther away.

HHUNGRYEEEEAAASHHELL! My God! They were even saying words! If I only had an ejection seat like they later did on fighter planes, I'd have blasted myself right through the ceiling. I was embarrassed to death. I have no idea what the preacher said or anything that happened. I sat there holding my stomach tight, trying to shut off the damn growling.

After two long years, the service was over. I was one of the first to get out of the church — I didn't even wait for Zack. I rushed to the nearest eating joint, and began to stuff those hungry animals. I resolved, then and there, to never again go to church without eating a double breakfast.

For some unknown reason, Carey Orr took a liking to Zack Mosley, Frank Engli, Jerry Bosch, and myself. He told us to save our tuition money. "Come out to my home every Monday night. Bring your drawings. We'll go over them, and I can teach you as much as in school."

This was better than Santa Claus. We cleaned out our lockers at school, and took all our junk home. We all had jobs in eating places, so we could devote more time to that, and do our drawing at night.

Mr. Orr had a nice home in Evanston, not very far from the end of the elevated train. We all marched in the first Monday with our drawings under our arms.

He seated us around a large dining table, and started tearing our cartoons apart. "This is bad — this is fair — this stinks!" Then he'd tell us why. He always held class until around midnight, then he'd say, "Let's have a drink and something to eat."

Engli would go to the basement where Mr. Orr had his still to make his home-made wine, and bring up several bottles. I was appointed the royal cook. I'd scramble all the eggs Mrs. Orr had in her refrigerator, and make toast. Eggs, toast, and wine ain't bad at one o'clock in the morning. School was never like this.

Soon after we'd started our Monday night class, an internal revenue man called on Mr. Orr. He wanted to go over Mr. Orr's books. He may or may not have found a discrepancy. No one will ever know, because he suddenly said, "Do you guys really make this much money?"

Mr. Orr said, "Yes, and some make a great deal more."

"No kidding! I like to draw. I should try to get in this business."

"I think you should," said Carey. "I have a class that meets every Monday night. Why don't you join us?"

So now we had five students. Our fifth member later started a strip, and the last I heard of him he was bouncing his own airplane all over the country.

The class lasted all winter. I expect Mrs. Orr was glad when it finished so she could have an egg Tuesday morning!

Our last class was mostly talk. When it was time to break up, Mr. Orr said we should have a real celebration. The wine started to flow. Frank Engli was kept busy bringing up more bottles. The night wore on, and pretty soon Engli's eyes looked like two bubbles in a slop-jar. He slid under the table, crawled across and bit Orr on the leg.

"That does it," said Orr. "When we start biting each other's legs it's time to quit — but you have a good party started and I don't wish to stop it." He brought up about ten quarts of wine, and told us to go home and finish them.

We said our goodbyes, and caught the elevated train back toward home. When we got to our stop, one of our bunch got up and announced to the other passengers, "Anybody who wants to join a good party, get off here!" Two girls and a man got off with us. We all went to our place and partied until daylight.

The fellow who lived under us later said, "You're the damndest guys I ever lived under. Most people start their party about nine o'clock. You people start dancing at four A. M."

Summer was starting, and I got the old feeling — here I come, Homeless Bound, again.

Zack was going home to Oklahoma City. I was going to Wink, Texas, where Dad was now living. Frank Engli didn't have any place to go. He had never been out of the Chicago area. He talked of going to California some day, so I said, "Why not now? Go as far as Oklahoma and Texas with us, and then on to the golden west."

Zack had arranged for us to ride with a cook who wanted to go to Houston. We paid him five dollars for gasoline. The cook wanted to cook our meals on the way, so we stopped at a grocery store and bought some eggs, and other things. We didn't like the idea of wasting time cooking, so while the fellow was building a fire I "accidentally" stepped on the sack of eggs. The cook said to hell with

it, so we got in the car and went on. We drove night and day until we got to Oklahoma City. The cook went on, and we shacked up in Zack's home for the night.

The next morning, after breakfast of course, Engli and I started thumbing to Childress. We didn't make very good time, and only got to Anadarko, Oklahoma. I went in a furniture store and asked the manager where we might find a cheap room.

"You can sleep on one of these beds here for fifty cents each," he said.

We sacked out on a new mattress and got a good night's rest. The next morning we went to a small cafe for breakfast, and at the far end of the counter sat a young Indian. It was the first real, live Indian warrior Engli had ever seen, and he could hardly eat for watching him.

When we had finished, I asked the waiter where the highway was to get out of town. The waiter didn't know, but the Indian spoke up. He gave us directions, and sounded like he was fresh out of England.

Engli couldn't believe it. "Why, he spoke better English than either of us. I thought all he could say would be "UGH."

We had better luck, and got into Childress before dark — in a howling sandstorm. You couldn't see across the street. Frank was tickled silly, because he had heard how the sand blew out west. He wrote all about it in his note book.

Another thing that amazed him was everyone speaking to each other when they passed on the street.

"Howdy," they'd say. He thought "howdy" was the best word he had ever heard, and wrote that in his little book.

We spent some fun days in Childress. I had several dates with my old school sweetheart. We got Frank a date, and several more couples went out to Lake Keeler, and had a picnic supper on the spillway. Then we built a fire and told ghost stories.

All good things end, so Frank and I shoved on. We thumbed to Chillicothe and then rode on top of a passenger train to Sweetwater. My Dad was born in Sweetwater on Bitter Creek. Figure that one out.

From Sweetwater we crawled on to the steps of a Southern Pacific pullman car, and hoped to ride to Pyote, but within twenty minutes, I got a cramp in my stomach. When the lid is closed above the steps, it doesn't leave much room below, so you have to sit doubled over. I was really hurting, and was about ready to jump, when they started slowing down for Colorado City. I ran back to where Engli was riding and pulled him out. We went back to the highway and hitched a ride on to Pyote.

As we walked on to the main street I saw my cousin, Jack DeGraftenreid, who was a Texas Ranger. He had on his big hat, khaki uniform, and two pearl-handled forty-fives.

I pointed toward Jack and told Engli, "There's a Texas Ranger. Let's go over and meet him."

Frank thought I had lost my mind. "Jees! Let's stay away from those guns."

"Come on," I said bravely. "It's just an old cowpuncher turned law."

Engli went with me, but he was doubtful about the whole business.

I shook hands with Jack and then introduced Engli. Now he really had something to write in his note book. He had shaken hands with a real live two-gun Ranger.

While we were talking, a fight started not ten steps away. Two men were rolling around in the oily street. Jack said, "Pardon me for a moment, Boys." He went to the fighters, grabbed them both by the collars, stood them up, and told them to stop it. Then he came back to us. Engli was really impressed. He was seeing all those Western movies in the flesh.

We then went on through Pyote and took a dirt road out to Wink. We walked about a mile and no car had passed us, so I thought maybe we were on the wrong road. There was a little one-room shack near the road — the only house we'd seen since we left Pyote, so I walked over to check. There was a screen door. It was very bright outside, so I couldn't see inside, but anyone inside could see me.

"Pardon me, is this the road to Wink?"

The voice inside said, "Sure, this is the road to Wink — but Boody Rogers, get your ass in here before you have a sunstroke." We went in, and there was Smokey Brown, the best bootlegger Childress ever had. There was a tin tub of iced bottled beer in the center of the room, and a few orange crates around the wall. That was all.

"What're you doing here, Smokey?"

"Oh, the heat was on in Childress, so I came down here until the law cooled down."

I told him we had just come from Chicago where we'd been studying art.

"Well, take off those coats and set yourself down, and if you'll draw some pictures on the wall, I'll give you some cold home brew."

After awhile we left. Engli couldn't get over me running into somebody I knew away out on the desert.

He stayed with Dad and me for a couple of days, then started on to California. As you know from a previous chapter, I borrowed Dad's

auto, drove back to Childress, and married Mary Thekla Norris. Maybe now I could get a home and settle down.

21

The Great Depression hit in 1929. It wasn't safe to walk on Wall Street. Some loser might jump from a twentieth story window and make sawdust out of you. There was a restaurant near Wall Street, that operated on the honor system. You ate, then went into another room and told the cashier how much you owed. They did a land-office business, but went broke in a month.

If you walked the streets of New York, a panel truck without a company name would pull up alongside of you.

"Hey, Mac", one of the riders would call, "Have you got a match?"

When you went over to the truck to give him a match, the man would whisper, "Mac, we deliver for Saks Fifth Avenue. We tried to deliver a suit, but the guy's vanished and left no forwarding address. He's already paid for the suit, so we'll let you have it for twenty bucks!"

I never knew where they stole it, and I never bought it. I didn't have the twenty bucks.

Men were selling apples on every block. Soup lines were all over the city. It was real bad. Most people were more friendly, though. We were all in the same boat.

I've heard people say they wished a good depression would come, and teach these kids who think money grows on trees a good lesson. Well, friends, those people never lived through the big depression or they'd wash their mouths out with carbolic acid. It wasn't so bad if you had a job, but if you didn't, it was hell. I hope I never see another. It was like a nightmare to me. All I did was shuffle for ham and eggs. I've often told people I never missed a meal, but I sure as hell postponed a few.

Thank goodness, it took awhile for the depression to seep down all the way to us guys near the bottom. I sold a few gags to the leading mags, lettered some "Dumb Dora" strips drawn by Paul Fung, drew a strip for Drug Topics (a druggist trade journal), did a little hard-back comic for Dell Publications called "Deadwood Gulch" — I did anything to make a few bucks.

I knew a family in Great Neck who were like the rest of us. We did anything to give a little diversion from our troubles.

This good man and wife hired a baby-sitter and went to a friend's house for a Saturday night party. The drinking might have been heavier than usual due to the stress of the times. They started home, and almost made it, but finally the man pulled over and told his wife, "I just can't drive any farther. I can't see the road. Can you take it?"

"No, I wouldn't dare. I'm seeing triple lines in the center of the road."

They went to sleep. He was awakened by a man who poked his head in the window. "If you'll tell me where you live, I'll drive you home."

He moved over, let the man drive, and promptly fell asleep. The driver waked them in their driveway. The lady got out and managed to get in the house, and fell into the bed.

The baby-sitter came, and the good samaritan said he'd take the girl home if he wanted him to. The man handed over his keys, and he, too, went up to bed.

The next morning about ten he finally woke, and lay there trying to collect his thoughts. Then suddenly, he remembered.

"Good God!" he shouted. "I gave a man the keys to my car!" He bounded out of bed and rushed to the window. There was his car down in the driveway. "Thank goodness, my car's safe!" Then he remembered the babysitter.

"I hope the girl is safe." He phoned, and she was okay. His wife had been listening to all this.

"You've worried about your car," she said, "You worried about the babysitter — why don't you worry about us? How do either of us know he didn't rape me?"

Mary and I enjoyed many happy hours with Tom and Joyce Holloway. We spent several vacations together, and over the years, Tom and I played thousands of games of "Pitch" at twenty five cents a game. "Pitch" is a good game, and the counters are high, low, jick (joker), jack and game. Sometimes we would play with the "petey" — that was the five card of trumps.

We kept a running score, and over the years I was two dollars and seventy-five cents ahead, which by the way, he still owes! He always contended that I cheated, but could never catch me to prove it. One time my daughter got a ring out of Crackerjacks with a mirror mounted on it instead of a jewel.

I put it on and turned the ring so the mirror would be in the palm of my hand. I told Tom that I wanted to confess, and showed him my ring.

"See," I said. "When I dealt, I could see every card as I slid it off over my little mirror."

"I knew damn well you were cheating," he said. "I noticed that ring for years but I never suspected it."

I never really cheated. I may have peeked at his cards a time or two, but he still owes me two dollars and seventy-five cents, so I guess that makes us even.

One summer we vacationed on Lake St. Catherine, near Poultney, Vermont. We were driving around the little town, looking at the houses and people. It seemed that every third person we saw was a redhead. Why so many, we wondered, and after discussing the phenomenon, I said there could only be one answer. Poultney must have a redheaded ice man. Tom thought it might be caused by rust.

"How's that," I asked.

Tom said, "These people are all hard-working people, and they don't have much time for sex, so they get pretty rusty. When they do have a child, the rust shows up."

Tom has a scientific mind, and I thought he may very well be right, but I still held out for the ice man. We drove around until we found the ice plant, and I pulled up to the dock. Out came a young, good-looking man, but he was wearing a hat. When he saw there were ladies in the car, he quickly removed it, and there was the brightest red hair you ever saw!

"What can I do for you?"

"You've already done it, friend," I answered, and drove off. As far as we could see him, he was still standing there, scratching his head. I suppose he was wondering what the hell that was all about.

Another summer, Mary and I and the Holloways rented a log cabin on a little lake in New Jersey. It had a living room with fireplace, two bedrooms, kitchen, bath, and a big screened porch. Tom was working for Liberty magazine then, and the first two weeks could only come on weekends. The last two weeks was his vacation, so we were all together.

There was a hammock on the front porch, and after meals Tom and I would run for it, and the winner couldn't be moved with anything short of dynamite.

I had brought my drawing table along, and would work on the porch. The Holloways little boy, Tommy, was about three then, and he dearly loved to play "house" under my table. Just as I was trying

to draw a sweet little nose on a pretty girl, Tommy would bump the table with his head, and the girl's nose would look like Andy Gump's. I moved the table to our bedroom in self defense.

Now sitting for long hours at the board would sometimes cause me to get cramps in my legs. One day the girls and little Tommy had gone swimming, and Tom was resting his fat in the hammock.

I was working like any decent person should, when suddenly my legs drew up like a crossbow. I couldn't get up from the table. I never before had my legs cramp to where they were drawn backwards. I pushed back and fell out of my chair, and started yelling for Tom to come help me.

The bastard just lay there, and I'll bet ten to one he had a smirk on his face. I screamed for help and kept yelling — but no Tom. I rubbed and rubbed, and tears were streaming down my face. The pain was awful, but finally I got them relaxed enough to get up. I went to the front porch and asked him why the hell he didn't come to help me?

"How stupid do you think I am? You just wanted to get me out of this hammock, and then you'd come dashing out and get it!"

"Couldn't you tell from my voice that I was in pain?"

"Sure. You put on a good show. I'll nominate you for an Oscar!"

I only wished it was me owing him two dollars and seventy-five cents. I certainly wouldn't pay it.

A refrigerated truck came by each day, and we would buy steaks and a delicious cocoanut pie. We'd grill the steaks and eat on the porch. Then after dinner, we'd clear the deck and play cards.

We soon learned we weren't the only ones living in the cabin. Every night a bat would come sailing over our heads. He'd make a tight turn, and buzz us again. The porch was narrow, so he always flew right over us. There's no telling how many points Mary and I lost. When we'd duck, I'm sure Tom added a few points to his and Joyce's score.

After a few nights of ducking the bat, we made plans how to put an end to his acrobatics. Tom found an old tennis racquet in the attic, so we placed it handy beside our table. Every time he came over, one of us would swat, but no dice. He was too fast. Then we just sat and watched. We were ready. The next time we smacked him, and Mr. Bat sailed off to bat heaven.

I felt a little guilty, for after all, the cabin was his home. I knew what a home meant to me, and I suppose a bat felt the same way.

The last week of our vacation, Mary and I were reading out on the porch, and Tom and Joyce had gone to bed. There was another cabin about a hundred yards away, at the lake's edge. There were

two lovey-dovey couples staying there. Every day we'd see them out by the lake, and they were always entwined. Tom thought their arms might be grown around each other. Anyhow, you could tell they were all very much in love.

This night, however, their arms must have come unglued, because over the cool night air came this battlecry: "You Brooklyn son-of-a-bitch. I'll split your goddamn empty head!"

"You and who else? That bitch beside you couldn't muster up a goodsized fart!"

"Don't you talk about me like that, or I'll kick your floozey right in the guts!"

"I'm gonna take this skillet and brain every one of you Brooklyn bastards!"

We called the Holloways. Tom got up and came out, but didn't wake Joyce.

Our lovebirds kept at it. One guy kept screaming, "You Brooklyn bastard, you must have been behind the door when they passed out brains." This was his favorite theme. The other guy would come back with something like this: "Oh yeah, if they packed all of your brains in a shotgun, they wouldn't have enough to kill a pregnant gnat."

Finally one of the girls said, "If you say that one more time I'm gonna throw everything out of this goddamn refrigerator."

"I'll say it again and again, you're nothing but a two-bit whore!"

Out came the contents of the box. We could hear the bottles and dishes hitting the floor, or maybe the walls. It sounded like she was throwing them. This went on for a good half hour, and finally died down from sheer exhaustion.

I don't think Joyce has ever forgiven Tom for not waking her. She missed all the excitement.

The next morning we paddled our boat by our lovebirds' cabin. They were having breakfast on a table right near the water, and practically sitting in each other's lap. They were smiling and chatting like they had a wonderful night's sleep —

"Pass the butter, Betty dear."

"Have some ham, Sam."

"More coffee, Pal?"

"Push the sugar, sweet!"

My cartoon markets started drying up one by one. The depression was tightening the screws and cutting off the milk and honey. We decided that Mary should go home to Texas so she could get three squares a day. I toughed it out a little longer hoping

something would turn up. I moved down to Greenwich Village with Bill Dwyer. We had a fifth floor walk-up apartment near the Houston Street subway station. Times were so bad that the manager of a little laundry would climb all those five flights every Monday morning to pick up our 30c worth of dirty shirts. We did our socks and underwear in the kitchen sink.

When one of us would sell a gag to a magazine, we were assured of eating for a couple of weeks.

Frank Engli and another fellow lived just around the corner, so one time we all pooled our money and went to a basement spaghetti joint to get a good meal. I think the dinner was 35c each, so each guy gave me an extra dime for the tip. When we finished, I paid for the dinner and handed the waiter the 40c. He looked at it for a moment in disgust, then threw it across the room. There was sawdust on the floor, but I scratched around until I found all four dimes. As I went to the door I told the waiter, "Sorry Bud, one of those dimes was a rare collector's piece. We only gave it to you because it was all we had — you blew it!"

Another tip episode happened in better times. Gilbert Bundy, a brother of Joyce Holloway, was an illustrator — a very fine artist. He took a party of friends to a New York night club for dinner and drinks.

They had a nice dinner and saw a good floor show. They got their coats and hats from the hatcheck girl, and started to leave. Their waiter grabbed Bundy by the arm and said, "What are you, a cheap wisenheimer? We depend on tips. I gave you good service and you left nothing. I think you're a four-flushing, big-shot slob."

Bundy said, "I'm sorry. I thought I had left enough, but if you don't think so —". With that, he picked up his plate, picked up the hundred dollar bill he had placed there, put it in his pocket, and walked out.

Another good friend had gotten along for years without hitting a lick. He was a past master at pulling the wool over his employer's eyes. I'll call him Karl, because I understand he's now gainfully employed, and I wouldn't want to jerk the rug.

It was the height of the depression. Karl was walking on Fifth Avenue and saw a 'Help Wanted' card in the window of a big piano company.

Karl turned in. He was a big, handsome fellow and was hired as a salesman. They put him on a retainer salary to be deducted from any future sales commissions he might make.

He first was to gather information for future sales. They gave him cards and addresses, and he was supposed to call on the people

and find out what, if any, kind of piano they had, how many children, etc.

He'd come to my place in the Village, get on the phone, and talk to the maid or someone, fill his cards, even fake it if necessary, and in thirty minutes he would be finished.

"Come on, Boody, let's go see a movie."

After Karl had worked for six months, the boss of his department called him in and said, "Karl, you haven't made one sale in half a year. The big boss upstairs wants to let you go, but I like you, Karl. What's your explanation?"

Karl told him that he had been working hard on his leads, and in a very short time his efforts would start paying off."

"That sounds good, Karl. I'll give you a little more time."

Karl was reinstated. He put his nose to the grindstone of doing nothing. Six months passed and Karl was called into the office again.

"Karl, you've worked a year, and you haven't sold a single piano. I really hate to do it — but you're fired."

Karl went to Chicago and told the brass at Montgomery Ward that he had some ideas that would revolutionize their catalog. They gave him a private office, and every morning he'd go to "work," prop his feet on his desk, and read his newspaper. If anyone came in, he would rear back and pretend to be thinking.

After a few months, they wanted to know what, if anything, he had done. Karl said he almost had his ideas organized and would soon revamp their book.

"We can't wait, Karl. Don't trip on the way out!"

All my markets bit the dust. I had enough money to buy a bus ticket to Texas, so here I went again. It was the same old story with one exception — I didn't have any expectations at the end of the trip.

The bus company was having a driver shortage, and drivers were having to work longer hours than usual. On the other side of Columbus, Ohio, our driver got out of the bus, raised the hood, and grabbed hold of two sparkplugs. He jerked all over like he had the St. Vitus Dance. He closed the hood, came back in, and started down the road.

"Why on earth did you do that?" I asked.

"To wake myself up, and boy that juice would wake up a wooden Indian."

Mary was living with her folks, and got a job with Woolworths. I couldn't find any kind of a job. I heard of a face powder and perfume

deal that could be bought wholesale for a dime, and sold retail for 29c.

Pete Hutchison and I went to Dallas and looked it over. It came in a gold box with a little bottle of perfume laying on top. The whole package was wrapped in clear cellophane, and looked like a million dollar value. We had hand bills printed up which stated:

“Irene LaMonte
Face Powder and Perfume
A two dollar value for only 29c
This is an advertising special
Only one box per customer
Sale starts at one P. M.”

We would contact a drug store, give them 10%, then use their rubber stamp so the people would know where they could get this wonderful value. I'm ashamed of what I did then, but it was the difference of eating or not eating. I don't believe it was quite as bad as stealing hubcaps.

We'd pass out hand bills all over town in the morning, and I'd sell all afternoon. Pete would bring in more merchandise when I ran short.

We sold Irene LaMonte in Sweetwater, Big Spring, Odessa, then Carlsbad, New Mexico, Roswell, and Clovis. I don't remember how many gross boxes we sold, but it was a truck load.

Many customers would bring in the hand bill and want two, or maybe one for their neighbor who couldn't get to town. I'd say I'll do it this time, but don't ever say anything about it, because the company may find out about it and fire me.

I never did know what it was — probably mostly chalk and sweet-smelling water, but it did have a real fancy package. It's surprising that the drug store owners would let us use their good reputations and do it.

Next, I teamed up with a fellow who had a tank truck. We went to the East Texas oil field, and went into business. We called on all big company named gas stations, and showed the operator how he could make some extra profit. We would mix cheap oil with his good oil and fill his underground gas tanks with cheap gas.

We bought our gas and oil from outlaw refineries. I don't remember what we paid for the gas, but it must have been much less than a dime because oil out of the well was only selling for ten cents a barrel.

The station operator would turn off his lights and we'd roll in and fill him up. I don't recall what he paid us for the goods, but we managed to eat with the profits.

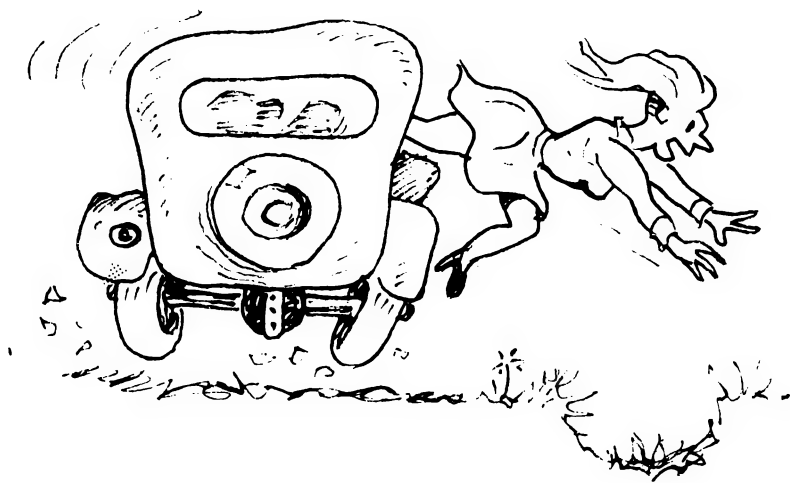
I have no idea of the damage it caused automobiles, but almost every car we passed was pinging like somebody was beating it with a hammer.

One night I was driving a touring car to make a delivery of motor oil. I had a big basket in the back seat filled with five gallon cans, and I covered it with an old blanket.

Young prostitutes worked the highways, and when men picked them up, they tried to peddle their product. If they didn't make a sale, they got out quick, and worked back toward town so they would never be far from home.

This night I saw two girls about five miles from Longview. Someone had dumped them out too far for girls with high heels to walk back. I stopped and picked them up. They both got in the front seat with me and started their pitch to soften me up. They told me what a nice looking fellow I was, which I didn't exactly agree with, but I certainly didn't resent it. Then one asked me what I did for a living. I have no idea what made me say what I did because nothing could have been further from my mind. "I work for an undertaking parlor," I said. "I've just picked up a guy who was run over by a train, and he was cut up pretty bad. I have his pieces back in that basket."

Both girls looked back and saw the basket covered with the blanket. The girl near the door baled out while I was doing at least



twenty-five. The other girl was going for the door when I grabbed her. "Don't jump — wait 'til I stop!"

The first girl was dusting herself off. I told her I had made a bad joke, and I was sorry, but neither of them would come near the car. They weren't sure I was joking, and they weren't taking any chances on riding with a chopped-up guy.

That was a tough summer. We took orders all day, and delivered all night. I slept whenever I could get ten minutes. I always slept when the tank truck was being filled. I almost turned the truck over several times, and it scared the daylights out of me. If that baby ever crashed, the fire would have been something to write home about.

Four of us heard of a spot that was rich with gold — so to northern California we went. The so-called "rich spot" was on the Klamath river about ten miles out of Yreka.

My Dad had worked at Weed, located at the foot of Mount Shasta. My Grandpa had worked through there in 1849. Maybe I'd find the pot of gold they had missed.

We made a deal with Mr. Clyburn, a farmer who had a neck of land jutting out to the Klamath. We built a one-room shack, two double bed frames filled with hay, a dirt floor, and had running ice water from the Klamath river ten feet from our door.

The cook started some sourdough, so we had sourdough biscuits, cream gravy, and whatever, twice a day. For breakfast we usually had hot cakes, eggs, and a pot of steaming black coffee.

We sunk a shaft down to bedrock, and then drifted alongside of the river, cleaning the bedrock crevasses of what we hoped was the shiny stuff. We cut timber to shore up our tunnel. One day another miner and I were chopping down a tree. We both chopped until we were given out, but the tree never made a wiggle. We sat down on a log to rest, and in a few minutes we had to jump for our lives when the tree fell. Never trust a tree. It'll try to get revenge.

During the night, our mine would fill with water, so before daybreak, it was my job to start the pump. I'd pump our tank full, then shoot the rest in the river. We had a sluice gate on the tank, and when we needed it, we'd let a little water run down the sluice box, and wash out the rocks and gravel. The gold would catch in the ripples built in the bottom of the sluice.

It was hard work, but very exciting. Your hope was always on tomorrow. That was the day you might hit the jackpot.

One day one of the Clyburn boys asked us if we liked deer meat. "You betcha! We'd like anything that was for free."

"I have hung you one in a tree back up that draw," said Clyburn.

It wasn't deer season, but I learned that the natives killed them all year long. It was meat on the table. It sure helped our table. It was cold and the deer was frozen stiff. He had hung it just high enough so the mountain lions couldn't get at it. We ate that, then bought a hind quarter of beef, and hung it in a tree just outside our cabin door. Hot sourdough biscuits, cream gravy (milk gravy), and beefsteak is hard to beat.

We were finding gold, but just enough to keep us in groceries. I suggested we start an hour earlier and work two hours longer, and we might get a little surplus. We tried that. We got more gold, but the extra work made us that much hungrier, so we had to buy more food, and still just broke even.

The work was back-breaking. I can't begin to count the yards of gravel we shoveled. So taking inventory, I found I had worked four months and had exactly nothing. I knew pushing a pencil was a picnic compared to a shovel, so I decided to go back to New York via Texas.

Our car had been eaten also. It was sold to get materials for our shack, stove, tools, and mostly food. We made our bedrolls, went by the mine, and gave it one last pat, and took off down the road. We left a good hole for someone to finish. I just hope it didn't cave in on someone.

We got a ride from Yreka to Dunsmuir. It was dark, so we hung a freight that had gondolas of wood chips. We burrowed down in them, wrapped in our blankets and slept like babies.

From Sacramento on south we rode on top of a freight. The entire top of the train was covered with men. They were just riding — going nowhere. They couldn't get a job where they'd been, and they wouldn't find a job where they were going. Don't talk to me about a depression. I'll choose fire and flood instead.

Somewhere along about Modesto, I caught a cinder in my right eye. It felt like that New Jersey bat had hit me. The pain was terrific, but I slept with it and awoke in the railroad yards of Bakersfield. When I crawled out of a boxcar, and into the sunlight, I couldn't stand to open either eye. My right eye was painning me something fierce, and it was also affecting my other eye.

I was blind. I told one of my friends to lead me to an eye, nose, and throat doctor, and quick! We walked into the business district and found one. I explained to the doctor my trouble, and told him I

was broke. He refused to help me. We went to another doctor. I also told him I didn't have any money. No soap!

I told my seeing eye pal, "Find another doc quick, and I'll not tell the bastard I'm broke." We found a third doctor. He was a young fellow, about my age, and I just couldn't lie to him.

"Doctor, my eye is killing me. I don't think I can stand it much longer. I'm broke, but please, get out whatever it is!"

He squirted something in my eye, and instantly the pain ceased. "Is that all it took? I could have washed it out myself."

"That just deadened the eyeball," said the doc, "You have a cinder sticking in your eye."

He took a pair of tweezers, gave a tug, and it was done. It took him all of thirty seconds. I wrote his name down but lost it before I got to Texas. I'd love to tell his name, and I hope he's rich. The other two guys, I hope the mumps went down on 'em.

The N.R.A. had just started. I got a job at a soda fountain in Childress. I was working fifteen hours a day and was paid one dollar. I worked seven days — seven dollars. I'll say this much — the druggist wasn't making it either. There wasn't enough business to put in your ear.

One day the N.R.A. inspector came to town. The news spread instantly up and down Main Street. Our boss called all the employees to the back. "Boys," he said, "if the N.R.A. inspector comes in and asks you what you're making, say you get thirty-five cents an hour and work ten hours. If you tell him the truth, I'll have to dig up the money and back-pay you. I'll get it some way, but when he leaves town — you're instantly fired.

That was telling it like it was. I went back to the fountain and wondered what I'd tell the guy if he came in. I could sure use the money — but I knew the boss couldn't afford it. Luckily, the inspector didn't come to our store, so I didn't have to make the decision.

Then the Great A&P hired me again. I was made the assistant manager, and paid seventeen bucks a week. Our big Saturday special was two cans of pork and beans for five cents!

I worked until I saved seventy-five dollars, and lit out for New York. I didn't want to arrive all cruddy on a freight, so I bought a bus ticket.

The bus stopped in some little town for our evening dinner, and I ate thirty cents worth. I paid my check and got seventy cents back. The bus started and we were almost out of town when I remembered — I had given the cashier a five dollar bill! I went to the driver, and told him to turn back. That four bucks was mighty important.

“That cafe man is honest. I know him. Give me your name and address and I’m sure that he’ll send it to you if he checks up long.”

That guy was a crook. I never heard. When I got to New York, I had twenty-eight dollars. I got a room for four dollars a week, and ate a few meals with my old friend, Jerry Bosch. He had married the girl who was with us in the “Dill Pickles” fight.

Then I ran into Zack Mosley. He wanted me to help him with Smilin’ Jack, as he was going to turn it into a daily strip for the New York News.

I brought Mary up from Texas, and we had seven good years before the war.

There hasn’t been a hard day since. I’ve found my home. I only left it for four short years — World War II.

22

I’ve said it before, and I’ll say it again. I had personal contact with hundreds of army officers, and as a whole, I found them to be decent human beings. There were a few exceptions — there had to be exceptions. Good Heavens! It’s beyond imagination to believe there wouldn’t be.

My commission number was 1-823-935 — almost two million, and I have heard that General MacArthur’s was number one. That means that two million men, from every walk of life, were brought into the army and made officers. I think it speaks very highly of America’s men to have so few misfits.

The exception may have been a great combat leader, but I doubt it if he did not have the respect of his men.

I was the executive officer of a Tank Destroyer Co. at Camp Hood, Texas. Our company commander had been shipped out, so I was the temporary commanding officer. I was sitting in my office and a Captain walked in.

“Are you Lieutenant Rogers?”

“Yes, sir. What can I do for you, Captain?”

“I am Captain Bang. As of now I am taking over this company. Have the company officers report to my office.”

“Yes, sir.” I thought to myself, ‘I wonder what’s eating this guy?’ I went out and found all the fellows and brought them to the office.

Now usually when an officer took over a company, he had his officers sit down, told them to smoke if they had 'em, and then found out what was cooking. Not Captain Bang. He left everyone standing at attention, and said, "I'm Captain Bang. When I leave this company you will call me a dirty son-of-a-bitch! The last company I had I broke two lieutenants. That's all, gentlemen, good day!"

We all walked out. One of the guys asked, "Who th' hell does he think he is?"

"I don't know, but we know WHAT he is, because he's already told us."

I'll say one thing for Captain Bang. He had everyone on the ball. He had an eye twitch and a slight limp. The troops called him "old Winkie half-step." They didn't say that to us officers, but one of the sergeants told me.

Whenever the troops stacked their rifles, they had to be in perfect line, or some officer got chewed. When the troops were told to take a ten minute break, they didn't take a nine and a half or a ten and a half minute. They took a ten minute break on the second.

I got along with Captain Bang by staying out of his way, and talking to him as little as possible, but this couldn't last forever. The last two weeks of the men's basic training was spent in the field.

Our company occupied a woods. I was given command of one platoon. We set up in a wagonwheel defense. The four platoons were placed around the wheel, and Captain Bang's command post was at the hub. He gave us his plan. The men's pup tents would be ten yards apart; slit trenches would be six feet long and two feet deep.

I called my non-coms together and told them to get a six foot stick and make a notch at two feet. Be positive that the slit trenches are right on the button. Don't deviate over a quarter of an inch. We probably had the most perfect bivouac ever in the army.

As soon as the morning chow was over, I marched my platoon off and did some prescribed training. When the platoons were gone, Captain Bang would inspect the area, and have his clerk make a note of any discrepancies. The Captain had given us a blueprint of how he wanted the men's gear laid out on a folded blanket in the opening of his tent. Everything had its proper place.

The next morning his runner delivered a letter to me. It said that he had found an empty match book in my area. Now leaves were a foot deep. A rattlesnake could be there, and hundreds of men had been there before us. Also, he found one mess kit turned backwards. He ended the letter with, "This shows dereliction of duty on the part of the officer."

Now dereliction of duty is a court martial offense. I told my Sergeant to fall the men in. When they were lined up, I read them the letter. I said that this was the worst letter I had ever received as a soldier or civilian, so they could see what we were up against.

Then I decided to go to his tent and demand an apology, or that he court martial me. I knew I was on safe ground, for the crimes he had stated were nonsense, and besides I was a drinking partner of the Battalion Commander.

I started for his tent when the mess officer called, "Hey, Boody, come see what "Winkie" sent me." He had gotten a letter stating that grease had been found on a stove, and the ending was the same as mine. We checked, and found all the officers had received about the same — so what th' hell!

The next morning, I had my non-coms cover our area with a fine-toothed comb, then I went around and double-checked. Everything was perfect. I went to Captain Bang and said I'd like to accompany him when he inspected my area. He twitched his eyes a few times, and gave his consent.

A little Italian soldier called Tony had pitched his tent as close to my command post as he could. I think he liked to be near so he could hear me and the non-coms plan for the day's operations. I guess it gave him a feeling of being on the inside. Anyhow, I told Tony to stay with me when the troops were marched away. Tony could follow me and correct anything wrong that the Captain might find.

The Captain came with his clerk. We went to every tent of my platoon. He kicked the leaves around to see if he could find anything. He didn't find even a cigarette butt. He told his clerk that the first platoon had passed inspection. The clerk noted it in his book. Captain Bang was turning to go when he froze in his tracks.

"There's something white up in that tree," and he pointed up. "That would be a give-away if an airplane flew over." The clerk was writing furiously.

I looked, and sure enough, I could see a small white speck high in the tree. This guy might have a twitch, but, by golly, he had the eye of an eagle.

"Up the tree, Tony, and see what it is."

Tony climbed up and called, "Sir, it's a rag woven in a bird's nest."

I turned, saluted, and said, "Captain, I have no jurisdiction over the wild life of this forest. What are your instructions, sir?"

Captain Bang twitched his eyes for a moment, then said, "Get it down."

I turned and yelled up the tree, "TONY, GET IT DOWN, AND DON'T YOU EVER LET THIS HAPPEN AGAIN!"

I could hear Tony laughing. "Yes, sir, one bird's nest coming down!" I asked the Captain if there was anything else.

"Carry on," he said and marched off. His clerk looked at me, gave a little smile, and twitched his eyes — then ran after the Captain. I never had any more trouble with Captain Bang.

Sunday was a day of rest, so the soldiers lay around, took a walk through the woods, went swimming in a creek nearby, played cards, or did anything they chose. I checked a couple of spots on the creek that I thought might made a good spot to hold some classes. There was one shallow place where the water was only a few inches deep as it ran over a flat bottom. I saw Captain Bang lying on his stomach in the water, his head cradled in his arms, fast asleep. The sun was hot, and his back looked like a beet.

A soldier came up, looked, and told me, "Lieutenant, we better wake the Captain or he's gonna burn his ass off."

"Get the hell out of here and be quiet. Don't you dare wake him." We tip-toed off. The next day the Captain couldn't put on his shirt. He lay in his tent for two days, and didn't bother anyone except his clerk. "Put some more of that cream just under my right shoulder blade."

The soldier, who had seen the Captain in the creek, spread the word all through the company. "Lieutenant Rogers let the Captain sleep and cook his butt!" Every soldier I passed that day would twitch his eyes and grin.

I had a class that afternoon, so I had the troops march to a nice, shady spot on the creek. As soon as everyone had found a place to sit, I said, "I don't think the Captain will slip up on us today, so the last guy in the creek buys the drinks!" Man, the buttons were flying. I never saw my guys move so fast. I saw I was too slow, so I jumped in, clothes and all. We had fun. I think it did a lot more good than an hour of "Military Courtesy."

During our last week in the field, my platoon Sergeant asked if he could speak to me privately. We walked to a little meadow. "Sir," he said, "I don't know how to tell you this, but Corporal Jones has troubles. He's been half nuts."

"Sounds serious. What's wrong?"

"Well, the supply officer stays in town every night and then trucks food out the next morning."

"What's wrong with that?"

"Well, the reason he stays in town is because he's shacking up with Jones' wife. I'm afraid Jones is gonna kill him."

"Are you sure this is true, Sergeant?"

"Yes, sir, I'm sure. I've checked."

I got in my jeep and went to Battalion Headquarters. I told the Colonel of the situation. "Sir," I said, "those boys have loaded guns. I'm afraid if something isn't done, a Lieutenant is going to get his balls shot off."

"Well, we'll solve this right now," and he rang for his G2. "Call personnel and have traveling orders cut for Lieutenant Hot Pants (he called his name) right away!"

"Send him where, sir?"

"Anywhere, just so long as it's out of Hood — step on it!"

I went back to our bivouac and told the Sergeant that everything had been taken care of, and he could pass the word to Jones.

Everything had been taken care of except one small hitch. When the Lieutenant left Hood, he took Jones's wife with him!

Captain Bang was shipped out and I was made Company Commander. There was a big soldier in the company who had been a truck driver in civilian life. He asked the top Sergeant if he could see me. The Sergeant checked with me, and sent the soldier in.

"Sir, I'm having a birthday Sunday. Is it possible for six of us to get passes to go to Dallas this weekend? We want to stay in a nice hotel, eat some good meals, and see some shows to celebrate my birthday."

"Okay, if you'll keep your noses clean. You're not supposed to go so far from camp. Be sure you're back Monday morning!"

"You don't have to worry, sir. All the guys are real nice fellows."

That should have been the tip-off, but I told the top-kick to give them passes.

They were back Monday for reveille. About noon a buck slip came down: 'The soldiers had trouble in Dallas, and I was to administer company punishment.' I had them brought to the office.

"All right, what did you do?" I asked.

"Sir, we didn't do anything. We had rooms in a little hotel; we had a couple of bottles of beer, and we were singing 'Happy Birthday.' The old lady called the Military Police. 'That's the honest truth,' they all said.

"I'm supposed to give you company punishment," I said. "I can restrict you to the company area; I can make you dig ditches all over

the landscape, or I can chew you out. Singing doesn't seem like such a crime, so consider yourselves chewed."

Two days later, the full report came. They had rented two adjoining rooms, got drunk, and kicked a hole in the wall so they could pass from one room to the next — and when the old lady complained, they told her to go f-k herself. I had already given them punishment, so they were off the hook.

Lieutenant Rudd was from San Antonio, and he was crazy about leather. Under his bunk looked like a shoe store. He had army shoes, dress shoes, cowboy boots, riding boots, house slippers all lined up and highly polished.

A notice was posted on the Battalion bulletin board calling for volunteers to be parachuted into the jungles of Burma for the purpose of organizing guerilla warfare against the Japs.

Rudd thought about this for a day or so, then made up his mind.

"Boody, I think I'll take a handfull of that."

"You're nuts, Rudd. Those guys will probably eat you."

"Well, what th' hell. I missed out on the Alamo, so I just as well go to Burma." He went down to personnel and volunteered. They sent him to Washington, D. C. to study the language, and to be briefed on Burma.

After the war I received a letter from Rudd while I was in Korea. Among a few other things, it said:

"Boody, General Sherman was right — 'War is Hell.' When I went to Washington, I was side-tracked and put in an office. I've fought the whole bloody war here. There are ten women to every man, and I have surrendered every night. Hope it's been as rough on you. Pooped Rudd."

Our old bunch of soldiers was shipped out, and we got in a company of new recruits. One was a tiny Chinese boy named Hung Faw. Hung's feet were so small that the army didn't have any shoes small enough to fit him, so they had to order some specially made.

His platoon Sergeant told him to put on two or three pairs of socks, and try to wear the larger shoes until the new ones came in.

Hung Faw did fine until one day, on a road march, Hung stepped in a hole. His shoe turned and Hung fell. The Lieutenant saw what had happened, so he walked over and said, "Faw, we'll just have to get you a pair of shoes that fits."

"Yes, sir," answered Faw. "Either that or fixee hole in road."

Just when I thought I might be promoted to Captain, I was sent to Lexington, Virginia to attend a "special service" class at Washington and Lee University.

It's a beautiful school — old southern plantation style buildings, a church that contains the tomb of General Robert E. Lee, and the campus adjoins the campus of Virginia Military Institute. Which was fine, but if you walked across the campus, you had to salute all those cadets from VMI. They saluted you as far as they could see you, and they also saluted the church where General Lee was buried.

When we arrived, they had tables set up, and several hundred of us lined up and filed by. The first table told you where you'd be quartered, the next where your classes would be, and so on. At the last table sat an officer who said, "This is the most important table of all. I give you your liquor ration book. Virginia has state liquor stores, and you have to give a coupon for each bottle, along with a few dollars. You'll find the nearest liquor store just off campus to your left. Walk, don't run!"

Everyone went directly to the liquor store. When I got there the line was fifty yards long. On the coupon book it stated, "Don't remove tickets. The attendant will remove when you are served."

The lone attendant moved like "Step-and-fetch-it" of the movies. He was the slowest moving man I ever saw. It would take hours, it seemed, for him to remove the ticket, pokey back to the whiskey, pick his nose a bit, pokey back, then pokey to the cash box to pokey back your change.

The officer just ahead of me thought he'd speed things up, so he tore out the Bourbon Ticket and handed it to the man.

"I'm supposed to tear that out," said the attendant.

"I just thought I'd help you out since you're so rushed. You saw me tear it out of this book."

"I'm supposed to tear it out. It says so right on your book. Next man!"

"Aren't you going to give me my order?"

"Nope. I'm supposed to tear it."

I'll bet nobody within hearing tore their coupon out. I got my bottle and told the officer I'd share it with him. I never figured out whether the Lexington People resented the army or what, but we ran into similar treatment all over town.

There were several large restaurants there — real nice places, so we'd skip the army chow and get a change. I'm an iced tea freak in the summer, so I'd always order iced tea to drink.

"Haven't got any iced tea," said the waitress. "I can give you hot tea."

“Can’t you put some ice in the hot tea, and make iced tea?”

“No, don’t have any ice.”

I wouldn’t eat there again. I’d go to the next place, and go through the same rigmarole again. I just couldn’t understand it.

The next time a few of us were going out to eat, I stopped at a soda fountain and told the lad to sell me a container of ice. I carried it in the cafe and put it down by my feet.

“What’ll you have to drink?” she said.

“Iced tea. I love good iced tea.”

“Don’t have iced tea. Can give you hot tea.”

“Fine. I also love hot tea.” I had emptied my water glass. When the girl brought me my cup of hot tea, I poured it in my glass and finished filling it with my ice. It made everyone in the cafe mad as hell.

When the month was up, the special service class put on a show in the auditorium. Red Skelton was in the class, and he was the show. He brought the house down.

I passed, and was sent back to Hood. In a few days, I was put on orders to report to Brooklyn.

Mary and little Judie left for Childress, Texas, and I headed for New York.

I reported in at Brooklyn with about thirty other officers from all branches of the service. We were transferred to the Transportation Corps, and a schedule was set up to teach us our new job. We were to report to a new department each day, and the officer in charge there was to show us how it worked.

The officers at the port were mostly men who were doing that same type of work when the war started. They were commissioned, and continued with their old jobs. Of course, they all had homes and families on Long Island — they were at home.

The scuttlebutt spread fast — ‘as soon as the new officers learned the ropes, they were to take over.’ The old officers were to be shipped overseas, which, of course, couldn’t have been further from the truth.

At nine o’clock the next morning we went to the first office. We marched up to the Major’s desk and saluted to report in. The poor guy almost fell out of his chair. He didn’t know whether to salute back, “clap hands, here comes Charlie,” or what. He never had military training, and didn’t know what to do, so he did the next best thing, which was nothing.

He asked, “Have you fellows all found quarters?”

We had rooms all over Brooklyn as they didn’t have any quarters at the Embarkation Center. “Partly,” we said, “But we still have

luggage, in lockers down at Penn Station.”

“Then why don’t you go see about them?”

So by 9:15 we were through with that office. We were free to roam New York until 9 the next morning. My room was within walking distance of Ebbets Field, and I was a Dodger fan. There was also a place in Manhattan where military people could get tickets for some shows. That came in handy.

Each day we would report to another office. It was the same thing. They’d ask if we had everything shipshape at our living quarters.

“No, we have luggage at Penn Station.”

“Then, take care of that,” and we were off to the races. They were going to put off teaching us as long as they could. They were happy, at home, and I couldn’t blame them.

One day we did go to the races out at Aqueduct race track. Military personnel could get in by just paying the tax. We bet on every race — and lost. The steeplechase race was next, so I picked a longshot to show. If my horse came in at least third, I’d recoup and have a little extra.

They were off. Old Number 5 was staying with the pack. Almost every jump lost a horse or two. Finally only two horses were left in the race, and number 5 was leading. I had a gut cinch. Now the other horse passed number 5, but I didn’t care. How could I lose with only two horses in the race. I was already counting my money, and then number 5 busted his prat on the last hurdle — only “Black Cat” finished.

I was still wearing my Tank Destroyer patch on my shoulder. It was a black panther chewing up a tank. Everyone near me was slapping me on the shoulder and pointing to my black cat — “I’ll bet you really cleaned up on that hunch. Old Black Cat came through for you.”

“Yeah, yeah,” I said, and I’ve never bet on a horse since. If you can’t win a “show” bet with only two horses in the race, it’s time to get out of the business.

After thirty days of going to Penn Station for my bags which were never there in the first place, I was handed orders to report to the Port of Embarkation at San Francisco.

I had become friends with an officer at Personnel, so I went over to see him about my orders.

“Can anything be done about this?” I asked. “I’d like to stay in New York.”

“Good Heavens,” he said. “I put you on that list and thought I was doing you a favor. Don’t you live in California?”

“No, as near a home as I’ve ever had is here on Long Island, but I’ll buy you a beer for trying.”

In two hours I was given a ticket, an army car carried me to Grand Central Station, and I was off and running again.

“California, here I come — right back where I started from — open wide those Golden Gates — and let me out of these goddamn states.”

23

I checked into the Bachelor’s Quarters at Fort Mason, San Francisco. My room had three beds, and since I was the first one there, I selected the one next to the window. I peeled off and hit the sack. It was welcome relief from the long train ride across the country.

About ten, another man came in and went to bed. I had just gotten off to sleep again when number three came in. He was on fire with excitement, and started telling bed patron number two about his conquest.

“I was browsing around in Gump’s, and I met this little clerk. Boy, was she ever stacked. Her lines made the Golden Gate Bridge look like a plank over a mud hole. And her smile — it divided all those cute little freckles. She had to be fresh off the farm. I took her to Fisherman’s Wharf for dinner, then we went to her place for dessert. Wowie! What dessert! I’ve had women from coast to coast, and from the Gulf to the Great Lakes, but brother, I’m telling you——”

He told and told. Blow by blow, every grunt and groan. I was so sleepy, and this fellow went on and on: “I’m telling you it was——!”

“For Christ’s sake, pal,” I said. “I’ll admit you’ve had the best bed bounce since old Adam flattened Eve, but write it in your memoirs, and let’s get some sleep.”

In the dark, he didn’t know whether I was a General or what. So he shut up. He was gone when I woke up. I suppose he was on his way to Gump’s.

I was assigned to the army transport “Sea Barb” as Special Services officer. The Sea Barb was a freighter transformed into a troop carrier. She could accommodate about three thousand troops and three hundred officers, so for the next few days I was busy as a

beaver getting all my supplies aboard — plus, four cases of Bourbon which I stashed in my clothes locker. It almost filled my locker, but clothes you wouldn't need at sea anyhow, and I was told we might be gone for six months. A guy could get bitten by a sea serpent or something. We weren't supposed to have any liquor aboard, but I later learned almost everyone did.

I got an army truck and driver, and drew three thousand Ditty bags from the Red Cross. They were little bags made by the women of America. They had straps the boys could tie around their waist. It contained a razor, soap, comb, writing paper, and toothpaste. A real handy package for a kid at sea. I had two movie sound projectors, enough musical instruments to outfit an orchestra, a library, a hundred cases of donated cigarettes, and a hundred cases of paperback books.

The last thing was to draw my movies. I wanted to get the latest ones I could. I was ready for sea. Then to add spice to the cake, I smuggled one more case of whiskey on board, and hung my clothes outside my locker. If we were shipwrecked, I figured I'd need bottles to place notes in to send for help.

I also went scrounging for a radio so I could keep up with the news. They put me in an Atwater-Kent shortwave set, placed it on my desk, and put the aerial on the highest booms of the ship. I could tune in most of the world.

After I had all my equipment, I had no duty, so I'd take in two or three movies a day, and spend my evenings on top of the Mark. What a spot! You could see all over San Francisco and the bay. It is, in my estimation, the best drinking spot in America.

One afternoon I saw the worst movie ever made. It was class Z minus. When I came out of the theatre, I saw a Western Union. I ducked in and wrote Frank Beaven a message: "When (name of movie) gets to your local theatre, be sure, stop, without fail, stop, to see it at first showing."

I handed it to the girl. She read it and asked, "Is this code? We aren't allowed to send code."

"Nope, it's not code. It's the worst picture I ever saw, and I want my best friend to be sure and see it."

"If he's your best friend, why do you want him to see a bad movie?"

"It's an old gag that we've been pulling on each other for years."

"I'll have to show this to the boss."

She was gone for about ten minutes. Finally the manager came.

“Now let’s see.” He asked, “This is your best friend and you want him to see a punk movie?”

I explained it to him. He studied it for a few moments, and said, “I’ll send it, but I still think it’s code.”

They started bringing the kids aboard. Pimpily-faced kids that should have been in high school, but were now turned into the greatest fighting machine in the world. Some of them weren’t big enough to whip their little sister, but they had something slung over their shoulder that made them more than equal to any guy on earth.

They were loaded into bunks, five deep, from deck to over head. The ship was air-conditioned, but it couldn’t cope with all that animal heat.

The traveling officers were packed in some large spaces below the main deck. It was better than being stacked in the holds like the troops, but their place wasn’t like the Ritz.

I was shackled up with Lt. Picket, the PX officer. I slept in the lower bunk — he in the upper. We had a bathroom with a shower of fresh water. The troops bathed in salt water, and could never really feel clean. The traveling officers used salt water, too. We let a few use our shower, and made some friends for life.

The ship’s regular army officers consisted of the Troop Commander, the Chaplain, Doctor, Dentist, Mess officer, and me, Special Services.

The ship was manned by civilians in the Transportation Corps. They were really civilians, but under the jurisdiction of the army.

The ship’s Captain was an old seadog named Adolph Anderson. He had been at sea since he was sixteen. He ran the ship, but the troop commander was really the power behind the throne.

I gave the running of the library to the Chaplain. It had a little cubby-hole where he could talk privately to any soldier who needed a preacher. I was glad to get rid of it because I had enough to keep me busy.

We had a hundred men seasick before we went under the Golden Gate bridge. The next morning I summoned all the men to sit on top of hatches one and two. There was a deckhouse between them, and up there I had mikes and loud speakers. I briefed them on what we had for them, and called for volunteers to put out a daily newspaper. I had a mimeograph machine, and an office for them to set up. I got an editor, reporters, cartoonist, and printers. I told them they had complete freedom of the press, just so long as they didn’t say

anything bad about me.

I also had a little black book where I had written the punch line of every joke I had ever heard. If I saw the punch line, I could remember the story. Some of them were old when I was a kid, but these young soldiers hadn't heard them. When we were having quiz shows or something, I'd tell one once in awhile. The Chaplain would hide in the officer's mess on the upper deck, and listen to my stories. He told me one day that I was a devil. "But," he said, "You corrupt 'em, and I'll try to save 'em."

He was a fine, good man, and we became strong friends. Whenever we went ashore, we were nearly always together.

In fact, all the boat officers got to be very close friends, and we had lots of fun. Often I'd be busy some place, and over the ship's inter-com I'd hear, "Lieutenant Rogers, report to the Commander's stateroom on the double."

I'd rush up to his place, go in and ask, "Yes, sir, what's up?"

"Sit down, and let's have a drink." The old man was just lonesome, so we'd have a drink and shoot the bull.

We didn't see very much of the doctor except at meal times and at night. He was generally busy. Scalzo, the dentist, and I played a lot of "Hearts" with anyone we could drag in.

The ship's crew was supposed to get their dental work taken care of while in port, but they'd wait until we were at sea and get it free. "It's killing me, Doc, pull it."

"Does it hurt when you eat sweets or drink cold water?"

"Yes, it sure does, Doc."

"Then don't eat sweets or drink anything cold." Doc would let them sweat a few hours, then he'd pull it.

Adolph Anderson, the ship's captain, would borrow a quart from me now and again, but would always pay me back when we made port. One day I was sitting in his cabin listening to one of his many sea adventures, when there was a tap on his door. One of his mates came in for some information, and while he was talking to the captain, he was eating a ham sandwich. Suddenly the captain slapped the mate's hand, and knocked the sandwich across the cabin.

"When you're talking to your captain, you, by God, don't stand chewing food," shouted Anderson. "Now get to hell out of here!"

The mate started to leave, and the captain stopped him. "I'm sorry," he said. "I just lost my head for a moment."

The mate left and Anderson told me that in the old days, a man

would be flogged for a stunt like that — but these young punks had no respect for anyone!

In a short time, the mate came back, and I'll be darned if he didn't have another sandwich. "Captain, I want to——." He never finished. Captain Anderson knocked the sandwich from his hand, and yelled, "Get out of here until you learn some sense!" I left too, as I could see he was pretty upset.

I tried to get along with all the crew, because when I needed help, I could always get it. They'd bring their problems to me, and ask to speak to the captain. "You can sweet-talk him, and help us out." I'd try, and sometimes it worked.

We blew some boilers and had to go to Pearl Harbor for repairs. The troops disembarked and were taken out to Schofield barracks. A few soldiers were from Hawaii and lived in Honolulu. They asked the Troop Commander if they could stay at home while we were tied up. He said they could, but to stay in touch because we might sail any day.

There was an officer's club on Waikiki Beach with an upstairs porch. We could sit up there, have a few cool ones, and watch the street and the surfboard riders. It was an ideal spot. We stayed in Pearl for sixteen days without a job — so we had a big, wonderful holiday.

Scalzo and I were watching the surfboard riders. They'd paddle out about 250 yards, and then come back like an express train. It looked so easy. Even small kids made it look like a piece of cake. "If those girls can do it, I can," said Scalzo.

"Nothing to it," I said, "Let's go."

We rented our boards from a man on the beach, and paddled out. Here came the first big wave. We paddled like mad to be going in the same direction when it caught up. I was on the crest. I got to my knees, but no further. The board went thirty feet one way, and I went the other. I looked for Scalzo, and he was in the same fix.

This went on for half an hour. We spent most of our time chasing the boards. My hip bones were so sore I could hardly lie on the board to paddle back out. Finally, to keep from drowning, we gave up. We just barely had enough strength left to get the boards back to their owner. Scalzo told him what he could do with 'em.

One day, all five of our gang were in our favorite chairs on the porch. It was getting late, and we had consumed several cool ones. The chaplain wouldn't drink whiskey, but he did take rum and coke. "That," said he, "is a preacher's drink."

From our perch, we saw two sailors supporting their buddy on

either side. They were taking him some place with his feet a-draggin'. He was out like Lottie's eye. The preacher said, "My, my, that boy is disgracing his uniform. He should be thrown in the brig."

The Commander said, "I think he should be given five years." Scalzo said, "Make it ten."

The Doctor joined in. "How about twenty?" Then I suggested, "Give the bum life!" and ordered another round.

"No," said the preacher, "but if he's going to drink like that he should at least get in a room somewhere."

"No, Chappie, life. Give him life." Then the Commander told us that the Hawaiian boy's parents were having a luau, and he and Chappie were invited.

"Why don't you guys come along?"

"Three of us can't barge in on a party," we said.

"I'll telephone," said the Commander. He talked to the lady of the house, and she said, "Of course, bring them along." What else could she say to her son's commanding officer.

We bought her a large box of chocolates and a couple of bottles of whiskey to make up for our rudeness — then took a taxi to the address.

Three extra people wouldn't make a ripple. There were at least one hundred in the house and backyard. We all took off our shoes and socks and placed them in slots on the front porch. Everyone was barefooted. We were given a tall cool one when we went through the door, and when it went down an inch, someone filled it back up. The dance started — everyone barefooted. We danced and sipped. Occasionally, a glass was dropped and broken.

"STOP THE DANCE!" Girls quickly swept up the glass. "START THE DANCE!" Then the eats were served. What eats! I had no idea what I was eating, but the best was a white meat smothered in a delicious red sauce.

"What is this?" I asked a young lady.

"That's raw fish. Have some more!"

Then some singing started. The Commander had his arms around two privates, and they were harmonizing. The luau was really jumping when the Chaplain collared me. "Boody, help me find the doctor. I think he has one of the girls out, and if he gets caught, it would be terrible for us."

"Okay, Chappie. Let's hunt." We found the doctor. He was spread out under a palm tree — passed out. He wasn't bothering nobody — no how!

Before long the Chappie got me again. "Now Scalzo is lost. I saw him with a girl. We'd better look."

We found Scalzo. He was sitting on the running board of an auto, heaving like his heels were coming up next. Womanhood was safe as far as Scalzo was concerned.

About two o'clock the Commander thought it was time to return to the ship. He asked the hostess if she would call a taxi for us. "Oh no," she said. "My brother will drive you."

I think she wanted to be rid of us without having to wait for a taxi. The doctor sat in front, and four of us crowded in the back. The singing was going good. I think it was "Ole Man River," and everyone was trying to sing bass — and then the doctor started throwing up on the car floor. "Good lord, man. Put your head out the window," said the driver.

"I wouldn't want to get the side of your car messed up," said Doc. Then he let it go in the floor again.

The fellow dumped us in the center of Honolulu. I guess he couldn't stand "gentlemanly" conduct any longer. I sat down on the curb. Doc and Scalzo were hanging onto a telephone pole, and Chappie and the Commander were trying to finish "Mississippi Mud."

Finally a taxi came and took us to Pearl Harbor. A Navy guard stopped us at the gate. The Chaplain got out, stood at attention, and said, "I vouch for all of these gentlemen."

The guard looked at us — lying all over the car — arms and heads sticking out of the taxi, and Chappie standing without shoes and socks.



“Pass in,” he said. I suppose he figured spies wouldn’t show up in our condition.

Everyone got up to the ship’s deck, but Scalzo and Doc never made it to their bunks. They slept on the deck right next to the gang plank.

When I went to breakfast, only Chappie was at our table. He was staring at his eggs, and holding his head. He hadn’t touched his orange juice, or anything. He was dealing with a new sin — a beauty of a hangover!

“Chappie,” I asked. “What do you think they should do with that drunken sailor?”

“I’ll tell you exactly what they should do with him,” said Chappie. “They should forgive the poor boy. I didn’t realize things could slip up on you like this!”

The Sea Barb was tied up almost in the opening of Pearl Harbor, just behind Hickam Field. The Chaplain and I went to Hickam’s operations room, and I asked if it would be possible to fly over the island. “Sure,” said the officer in charge. “A pilot needs some flying time and is going out to his plane right now. Go catch him.”

We took off, and I sat in the co-pilot’s seat. After awhile the pilot asked me if I could fly. I told him I had learned at Roosevelt Field, Long Island. He turned the controls over to me, and we really saw the island of Oahu. I circled it twice, and went through the pass where the Japs came in — then crisscrossed the island and saw it all. It’s a beautiful, lush, tropical paradise. I could imagine what a wonderful spot it must have been before the white man started taking it apart.

The troops were brought aboard, and some new passengers were added. Forty nurses! Our three hundred traveling officers said they would be happy to share their quarters with them, but the girls were given other quarters — with a guard. Everyone volunteered for that duty!

Within two days everyone had become acquainted, and most of the nurses had paired off with an officer. It’s strange how a tropical moon, flying fishes, and a cool ocean breeze can heat up a fast romance. I never saw any hanky-panky going on because I never looked, but the singing was great. A bunch of girls and boys would get together and really bear down. The soldiers on the deck below would applaud and cheer every song. It was a fun cruise at

government expense — then suddenly, we would be brought back as to why we were there.

ATTACK DRILL!

The Troop Commander would sound the alarm. We never knew when it would come. Whatever you were doing, you cut it off and ran to your post. My post was forward, almost to the bow on the starboard side. I never did know what I was supposed to do at my post. Probably to run like hell if I saw a torpedo was going to hit there.

All the men stood on the hatches. Half faced starboard — half portside. The theory was that if a torpedo exploded under them, they'd be headed out for the water, and could dive in. I wonder!

The crew went to man the life boats, and others went to chop the life raft free.

Next the scuttlebutt would start. Who started the rumors, nobody ever knew, but they were always the same. Maybe some of the crew did it just for kicks. The first story would spread like wildfire. "This old bucket was in a collision in the harbor and busted right in the middle. They didn't send it to the shipyards for repairs. They were in a big hurry to get us where we're going, so they just bolted it together. Don't you hear it groaning at night? If we ever get in a high sea, she'll come apart."

Some men would go to sick bay or just sleep on deck to find a cooler spot. There would be empty bunks, and that fit in with the next rumor. "A bad disease has broken out on the ship, and men are dying like flies. The officers are dumping them overboard at night. They're keeping it quiet so we won't panic. See this empty bunk? Ole George went over the side last night."

It scared some boys silly. When the Chaplain held services on deck, he could count on a full house. He'd tell them they were only rumors and not true, but the soldiers thought he was only trying to cover up the awful truth.

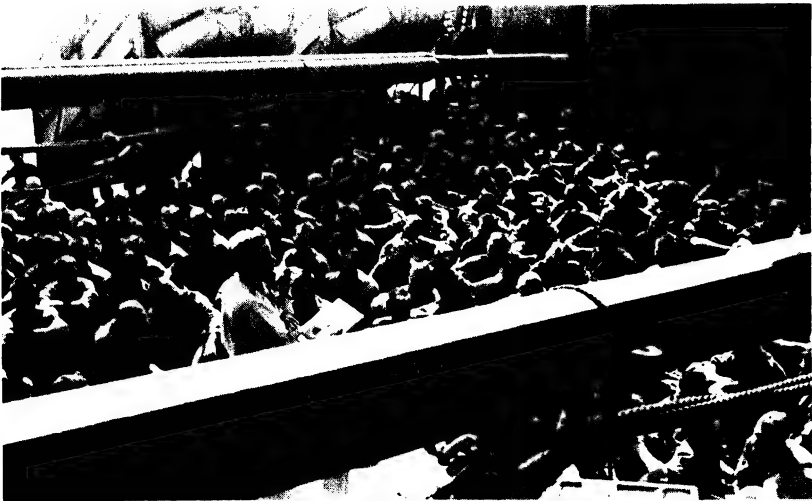
Another one was, "Last night a sub surfaced twenty yards off our bow. It turned out to be one of ours, but nobody knew it was within a hundred miles. If our own submarines can get that close, what about a Jap sub? Boy! Never take you life jacket off."

The worst one, I thought, was about the soldier who carried something up to the bridge. "He was in the chart house, and he saw a map with our course marked out. We are going right in to Yokohama, Japan. We're not going to some staging area and get ready. We're going in without any ammunition or anything. We'll be slaughtered like pigs!"

One day I was on my deck house talking to the soldiers, and I suggested that they use the library more. "You can draw out cards, checkerboards, or anything we have — only return them when you're through so the next guys can use them."

Then I told them about a book we had in the library called "Forever Amber." "Page 96," I said, "is the only page that doesn't tell about some king or knight getting Amber in bed."

That evening at dinner, Chappie said, "Boody, stop telling the troops these wild tales. I had over a thousand men trying to get 'Forever Amber' today, and I only have one copy."



Church Services on the Sea Barb. Chaplain Evans said he would try to save the troops' souls after I corrupted them.

I put on a home talent show on the stern. A small deckhouse there made a good stage. I had a full orchestra, and plenty of talent. The nurses helped. Some sang, and four of them did the Can-can. When they kicked, you'd think the ship had been torpedoed. The roar could be heard clear to Tokyo.

My Special Services Sergeant was Leo Fink. He had played in New York big bands, and he was a big help and a fine fellow. He could get the show on the road.

We also had many quiz shows and bingo games. Leo would walk around among the troops, place his hand on some soldier, and say, "I have a lady in the balcony, Doctor," "Okay, Miss," I'd say, "What's the largest city in the U.S.A.?"

Invariably, the boy, using a high voice, would give the name of his hometown. "That's close enough," I'd say. "Give that lady two packages of cigarettes." We killed many hours that way. The bingo games were popular, too.

On one side of the deck house, the soldiers who had money would play for a dime a card. The other side played for a carton of cigarettes. Sometimes a soldier would kick because they weren't his brand. "Can you really tell the difference?" I'd ask.

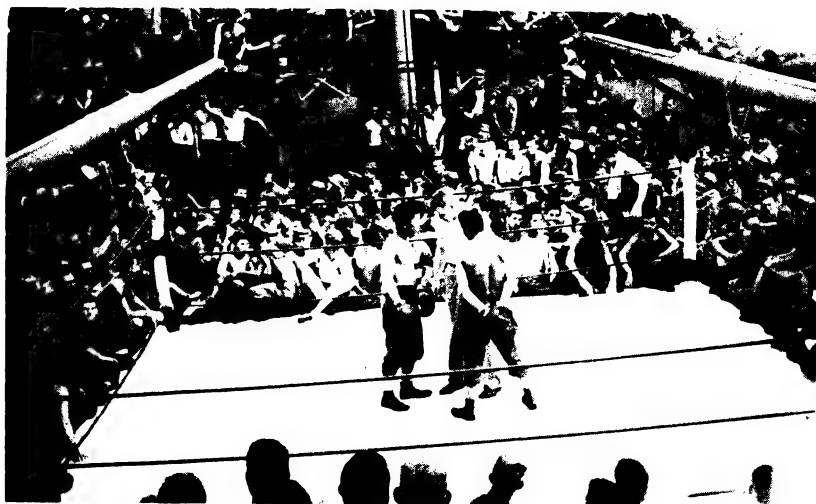
"I sure can."

"Then come up here and we'll see." The boy would come up, a blindfold would be placed over his eyes, then four soldiers would light up four different brands, and give him one at a time. Not once did anyone ever pick out his favorite, but after the stunt, I'd give him a carton of his choice.

I think the soldiers enjoyed the game, shows, and newspaper. I hope so because a month is a long time to take salt water baths. When we'd hit a rain squall, no one would move. They'd sit there and bathe in the rain. On hot nights, you couldn't walk on the deck. They would be lying in a tangled mess. You'd see an arm here, three legs there, and sometimes you could never see the kid's head. But I'm sure it was cooler than below.

The poker games went 24 hours a day. One man would run the game. He'd hire two big buys for his bodyguard, and bouncers. He'd never gamble a nickel. He'd furnish the cards, cut the pot for his take, and would keep down all fights. If a guy got mad, he was thrown out of the game. If a bunch played without supervision, pretty soon someone would be cut up. Controlled games were the only kind we would permit.

Once we were taking on troops at Leyte. A big fellow spread a canvas on the deck. It had roulette betting spaces on it. Then he started slipping pieces of paper under the edges of his little wheel. I



Boxing on the way to Korea. I'm at ringside with the naked legs.

stopped and watched him for a minute, then asked what he was doing.

"I'm trying to get this damn roulette wheel level, sir."

"I don't think you need to bother," I said. "When we get underway, this deck will be every way but level."

He thought about that, then started pulling the paper from under his wheel. "THE GAME'S OPEN!" he shouted.

One of the game operators had Chappie lock up his daily take in our safe. When we got to San Francisco, he had over thirty thousand dollars. I'll bet the Internal Revenue never heard of that.

We put the nurses ashore at Okinawa. They went down a rope ladder into a Higgins' boat. We were about a mile from shore, but were having big land swells. The Higgins' boat would rise about ten feet, then drop the same. Four officers were in the boat to catch the girls. They told the nurses to jump when the boat came up, and they would catch them. Never once would the girls turn loose when the boat was up, but always when the boat was at its lowest. The men would catch the nurse, and they'd all fall head over teacup in a jumbled heap.

All of the troops were hanging over the rail, and it almost tipped the ship over. Every time a nurse busted it, they'd yell. I'll bet the guys on shore wondered what was going on. It was a great show while it lasted.

I almost bought it at Okinawa. I was in a life boat that was put down to take several of us ashore. When the boat hits the water, the weight is taken off the lines, and they are supposed to release on both ends of the boat.

One did, but the other jammed. When the ship rose, we were swinging alongside perpendicular. I was hanging on for dear life and trying to dodge the swinging block and tackle from the other line. When the water would rise, we would flatten out, then in a second we would be hanging and swinging beside the ship. A seaman finally crawled to the faulty rope, and when we flattened, he cut the line.

Then we were free, but a geyser of water started shooting up in the middle of the boat. The plug was out. I was trying to hold my hand over the hole, but the boat was filling up. Finally someone found the plug, and we cut off the water spout.

I was wearing a life preserver which inflated when you pulled a trigger, exploding a little metal bottle, and instantly filling the tube with air.

When we got ashore, I stooped over and accidentally pulled the trigger. The preserver filled, then went flat in a second. It had a big hole. If I had been dumped in the ocean, I would have gone straight to the bottom.

Okinawa had family tombs dug in the sides of almost every hill. It was a round room with tiers covered with big urns. When a family member died, he or she was placed in the tomb, with the head placed between the knees in a fetal position. From the womb to the tomb!

Then in a few months, when the body was decomposed, a virgin of the family had to crawl inside and scrape the bones clean and place them in an urn.

An officer told me it was virtually impossible to find a virgin in Okinawa.

Great Day in the Morning! Orders came through, and Scalzo and I had been promoted to Captain!

The big bomb was dropped and the war came to an end. The night sky was lighted up with millions of tracer bullets. Most boys were going home, but not all.

We took occupation troops to Korea and landed them in Inchon. The next day after all the soldiers were off the ship, Chappie and I went ashore. The Transportation Corps had taken over a building on the bay, and set up their offices. We went in a large room where desks had been lined up around the room, and behind each desk

except one, sat a Lieutenant. At the far end of the room in the center, sat a Captain. We went to the head man.

"We're from the Sea Barb, and we'd like to get a jeep and drive over to Seoul."

"Oh, gee, fellows, I'm sorry, but we don't have an available jeep. They're all busy."

"That's too bad," I said. "Where can we get a beer around here?"

"You're outta luck again. The beer and whiskey haven't caught up with us yet. There's not a drop to be had."

"Hey," I said. "Then maybe I can sell my case of whiskey. You wouldn't know of anyone who might buy a case, would you?"

"No-o-o," said the Captain, pretending to think. "I don't know right off. If I should hear of anyone, how much would you ask for it?"

"About two hundred dollars, I guess. Of course, it didn't cost that much, but I've hauled it about ten thousand miles, and freight being what it is——"

Every Lieutenant in the room had raised up, and were sidling slowly toward us against the wall. The Chaplain whispered in my ear, "Cut this out, Boody. You're driving these guys nuts."

"Hold everything, Chappie, it's working," I whispered. Then I turned back to the Captain.

"Are you sure you don't have a jeep?"

All of the Lieutenants were in our end of the room. "Don't just stand there! Somebody get the Chaplain and Captain a jeep!" yelled the Captain.

"Yes, sir!" and two officers ran from the room.

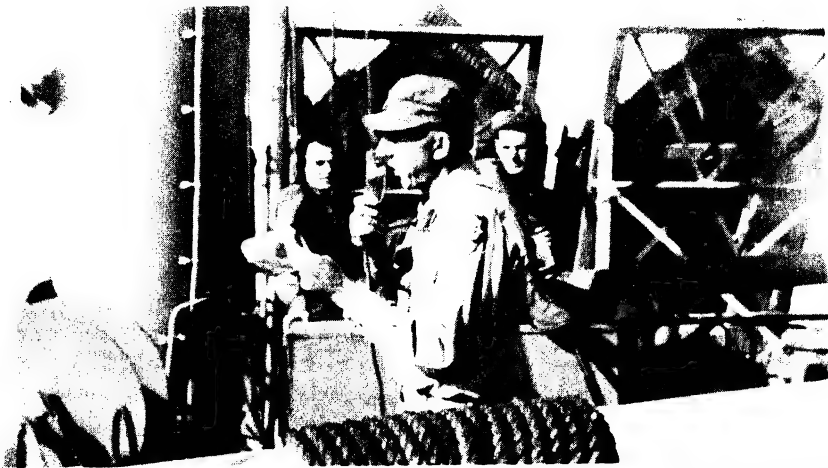
"Thanks," I said. "Keep your ears open for somebody who wants to buy my case. Maybe you can let me know when we get back from Seoul."

We started for Seoul. The Chaplain told me I shouldn't lie to the boys like that. I said I wasn't lying. "I've got an extra case — and they won't look for a buyer. They're getting the money up right now."

We looked Seoul over. It was a very interesting city. We parked our jeep in a motor pool, and walked on the narrow streets. All eating places were off limits to us. We were told we couldn't eat their food because they used human fertilizer, and we'd really have a bad case of the crud.

The army had set up an officers' mess in the Royal Palace, so we ate in the throne room.

After lunch, we prowled the streets again. The little shops were almost empty of goods. I bought Sake bottles. Some were beauties,



Using a deck-house for a stage, I could talk to fifteen hundred troops at a time — quiz shows, bingo, etc.

and all were hand-painted. Also got some wooden dolls for Judie. We were standing in front of a store, when two girls came up to us. They were painted up with heavy pancake makeup, and looked more like clowns than what they were.

"You got jeep?" they asked.

"Yes, we got jeep," I answered.

"Take us out to country (giggle, giggle), and we show you good time." More giggling.

"Will you show this soldier a good time?" and I pointed to Chappie.

"Oh yes, we make him velly happy."

"Look," I said. "We can't right now, but if you'll be right here tonight, we'll go to the country."

"We'll be here." (Giggle-giggle)

While on the road going back, Chappie said, "Boody, you'll never get to Heaven telling lies like that. You knew we wouldn't be back."

"I sure don't want to sin. Maybe we should go back."

"Oh heavens, no, keep driving!"

When we got back to Inchon and turned in our jeep, two officers were waiting with two hundred bucks. They had a boat ready, and took us the two miles to where the Sea Barb was anchored. I took them to my cabin, and dug out the whiskey. I opened it to show them it was full, and placed three glasses on my desk. "Now," I said. "Don't you think we should take a drink to seal the bargain?"

“Right on,” and they opened one of their bottles. I got ice and cooled a few. Those guys were either beginners or they hadn’t had a drink for a long time. In a half hour both of them were flat on the deck sawing wood.

All night the signal light was flashing from shore: “Sea Barb, where are Lts. Scott and Moore?”

I had our signal man send a reply. “They went to the barn to take a crap, and the hogs ate them.”

It wasn’t long until we got a reply from shore — “It serves them right.”

The next morning we fed the two AWOL officers, and Leo and I went ashore with them to take in our mail. We dumped it at the U.S. Post Office, then took the empty mailbag with us to carry any loot we found.

I wanted Sake bottles to make a collection. Leo didn’t care what he bought, so we went shopping.

Whenever we went in a shop, a bunch of Koreans would follow us. They liked to hear us bargain. The shopkeeper would say the price was twelve yen. I’d say I’d give six. Then we would haggle. Finally, we’d split the difference and close the deal. The onlookers would slap us on the back and laugh. I never knew whether they were laughing at us, or were just happy.

One shopkeeper told me the price was ten yen and four yen tax.

“Tax for who?” I’d ask.

“For the government,” he said.

“What government?”

“The Japanese government.”

“To hell with the Japs. We’ve just whipped them. We’re the government.”

“That’s right,” he said. “Forget tax.”

Our kibitzers really howled at that. More slaps on my back. The Koreans were really glad to get rid of the Japs.

Whenever we made a purchase, we would go out into the street to put it in the bag. I’d say, “Hold the bag tight, and when I put in this bottle, close it fast so he can’t get out.”

He quick opened the sack, I’d thrust the bottle in — Leo would shut it quick, then jerk the bag around like whatever was in there was trying to escape.

We finally had the street full of people, mostly adults, trying to see what we had in the sack. They followed us, and so many would go in the shops with us, that we couldn’t operate. I told Leo we had to break this up. I imagine we had two hundred Koreans around us.

“All right, everybody!” I yelled. “Stand back! We’re gonna let this wild thing out of the sack.”

They backed up and made a ring around us. Leo was shaking the bag. Suddenly he dumped the whole bunch of bottles in the street. I thought they were going to beat our backs off. Everyone was laughing, and wanted to slap our backs. They’re simple people, but very friendly.

There was one thing we couldn’t get used to — regardless of where a Korean was, when the urge to go to the toilet hit him, he went — men, women, children. Other people would just step out of the way so they wouldn’t get splashed.

We had word that we would be leaving that evening, so Chappie and I went to town to spend our last yens. When we finished and were starting back to the docks, I told the Chappie that all my life I had wanted to wee-wee in the middle of some main street.

“Now’s your chance. Go to it.” said Chappie. I walked over to the curb and unzipped. If you think it’s easy with people passing within two feet of you, you’re off your rocker. I strained and strained until I was blue in the face, but I never got out enough to write ‘Boody’ in the dust. I did it, though, I did it! Not everyone can boast of having gone in main street, in plain sight, during daylight!

The Sea Barb sailed to the Philippines, and took on homebound troops. Then to Biak to get the few remaining there. Biak was a little coral island with palm trees growing right down to the water. The SeaBees had built the only dock — out of solid mahogany. It was the only place I had ever been where the rain dried on your shirt the moment it hit.

Green parrots were squawking and flying all over. It was really a jungle. The people were very small, almost pygmies. We went to one of their villages. All the thatched huts were built out over the water to keep away from the bugs. The beaches in front of their huts were of white coral and spotlessly clean. I walked out on a one-log-wide bridge to their huts. All they had in them was a bucket to build a fire in and a few ammunition boxes. These people were poor. They really didn’t have a pot.

I traded cigarettes for some primitive carvings, and when I tried to take a picture of some young girls, they ran to the jungle and hid. I asked a soldier who had been stationed on the island about this. “They think the camera is some kind of evil eye, and will make them pregnant.” The old women would pose any time. They had outgrown that old evil eye.

When we started back to the ship, we passed one of their graveyards. Someone had died recently, and all of the family had to

sit on the grave for six days. That was so the dead person wouldn't be lonesome until he could get used to his new home.

There were about twenty on this grave, all huddled as close together as they could pack. The heat must have been terrible. Little children's heads were sticking out between the adults. They looked like sad little black monkeys.

I told the jeep driver to stop. I walked over to the grave. No one said a word, and neither did I. I took all the remaining cigarettes left in my shoulder bag, and placed them on the ground. As we drove off, I saw a child dart out and get them, then run back to the pack.

We sailed down the length of New Guinea to Finschhafen, near the eastern end. Enroute I saw my first live volcano. It was a perfect ice cream cone coming out of the sea. We could see the glow from it long after dark.

Four of us went ashore in "Finch," and got a driver and command car. We told the driver to take us to a swimming hole that we had heard of back in the jungle.

I sat in the front seat and started a conversation with the soldier driver. We spoke "Y'all come" talk, and I asked what part of the south he was from.

"Arkansas," he said, and he told us the name of the little town. The Chaplain perked up, because his wife had come from the same town.

"Do you know Mr. Blosser?" asked Chappie. That was his father-in-law's name.

"Know him!" answered the soldier. "I married his youngest daughter."

The swimming hole was grand. A waterfall, about a hundred feet high, was tumbling out of the jungle into a big rock basin. It had worn the rock away, and it was as smooth as a bathtub. We had a cold swim, and the Chaplain got acquainted with his new brother-in-law.

That night we sailed through the Solomon Sea, past New Britain, and California here we come!

Three unimportant things have always bugged me. First: why does a horse always raise up front feet first? Second: why does a cow raise up hind feet first? Third: if water north of the Equator whirls down a drain clockwise, and water south of the Equator whirls anit-clockwise, what does water do if you're right smack dab on top of the Equator line? Does it go both ways at once, fly up and hit you in the kisser, or what? That's my main question.



Mary, Judie, and I toasting our very first own home — Christmas in Westbury, N. Y. 1947.

The first two questions were put to rest by Glenn Shelton, a Wichita Falls columnist.

He said, "A horse raises up front feet first so the bull will be sure to see that it's a horse. The cow gets up hind feet first—oh, forget it!"

We were nearing the Equator, so I made a deal with one of the mates to buzz me the second we got on the Equator.

I invited five officers to come watch this experiment. There was a full Colonel, two Majors, and two Captains. I filled my wash basin with clear, cool water, then I broke out two bottles, and started mixing drinks. We had about thirty minutes before we were due at the Equator. By that time we were a very happy group with nary a pain.

The mate called on the intercom, "Ready for the countdown. Five — four — three — two — Bingo!"

I jerked the cork!

Not a word was uttered. We all stood watching the wash basin with our eyes bugged out. We must have stood in silence for five minutes, when finally someone said, "For God's sake, pour a drink, quick!" My hands were shaking, but I poured six drinks.

The Colonel said, "Let's all put our hands together and swear we'll never breathe to a living human being what we have just witnessed."

We stood in a circle with our hands stacked in the center, and gave our solemn oath — "I swear, by all that's holy, that I shall never divulge what I have seen in this cabin."

I placed a towel over the sink so I wouldn't have to see it any more.

Then we drank, and threw the glasses through the porthole into the sea.





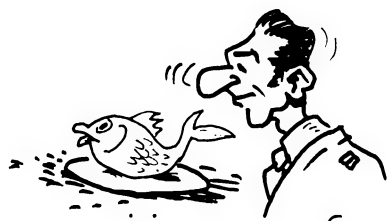
Goodnight, Dear Reader.

**PAGES 195-198 MISSING
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